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Strong tremors kill 2 in Cyprus

NICOSIA (Agencies) — The strongest earth tremors since 1953 jolted this East Mediterranean island overnight, killing an elderly couple and injuring five villagers. Some 1,000 people spent the night outdoors after the quake, police said. President Glafkos Clerides called off a top-level meeting to fly to the scene by helicopter and supervise a clean-up operation in the mountainous Paphos area. Six people were also injured, mostly out of panic, after the quake late Thursday which measured 5.7 on the Richter scale and hit the west of the island. The two Cypriots who died, Charilaos Hadjigeorgiou, 75, and his wife Stella, 65, were buried alive in Miliou, neighbouring the worst-damaged village of Pano-Arodhes. Hundreds of frightened villagers spent the night outdoors, some preferring to sleep in their cars, and police were mobilised to the scene. "People were alarmed by it," said Briton Dennis Smith, staying at the Annable hotel in Paphos with his wife Sandra on a week's holiday. The last major temblor to hit the island was in 1953 when 64 people were killed and 200 injured in the same area.

Hizbollah proposes peace with Israel

TYRE (AFP) — Hizbollah group on Friday for the first time proposed making peace with Israel if the Jewish state withdraws from all Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian lands. The movement had so far refused to consider peace with Israel, rejected the Arab-Israeli peace talks, and called for the "elimination" of the Zionist "entity." "If they want a solution, let Israel withdraw from all Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian territory," Sheikh Naim Kassem, Hizbollah's assistant secretary general, told 7,000 people in the southern coastal town of Tyre. "If the territories are recovered, the affair will be settled and there will be peace," he said in a speech marking Jerusalem Day. "If not we will not accept a truce and we will continue the resistance." Two Israeli warplanes flew several flights over the site of the Hizbollah gathering but provoke no reaction from the participants, some of whom were armed. Israeli warplanes also flew over Baalbek in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley where 3,000 people marked the last Friday of the fasting month of Ramadan.

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U.S. moves to write off $488m of Jordan's debts

House sub-committee cuts $275m outlay to $50m, but unlikely to affect final outcome

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Clinton administration, in line with its commitment to Jordan, has taken the step of proposing to Congress a measure that will allow it to write off $488 million of the Kingdom's debts to the U.S. in fiscal 1995, a senior official said Friday.

Rania Atalla, head of the Jordan Information Bureau (JIB) in Washington, said the measure was contained in a "Fiscal Year 1995 Supplemental" that the administration presented to Congress last week.

Ms. Atalla said the proposal was in the form of seeking outlays of $275 million, which will technically allow the administration to write off up to $488 million of Jordan's debts.

Washington has promised a write-off of $702 million to Jordan's debts to the U.S. spread over three years and wrote off $220 million — the first tranche of the cancellation — in fiscal 1994. The rest was supposed to have been cancelled in two tranches, in fiscal 1995 and 1996, but Washington has moved to do so in one tranche by proposing in the FY 1995 supplemental, Ms. Atalla explained.

The move to cancel the entire remainder in one tranche in fiscal 1995 was promised to Foreign Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti two weeks ago when he visited Washington and held talks with Secretary of State Warren Christopher and other officials.

Ms. Atalla, in a telephone interview with the Jordan Times, said the FY 1995 Supplemental, which is not linked to direct American economic or military aid, was considered by the House of Representatives Appropriations Sub-Committee on Foreign Operations on Thursday.

The sub-committee reduced the outlay for the write-off of the Jordanian debt to $50 million from the requested $275 million, but in real terms of the American legislative process this move means very little, Ms. Atalla said.

"It is a seven-stage process that has started at the sub-committee level," she said. The bill has to go through the full appropriation committee, then the full House of Representatives before moving on to the Senate appropriations sub-committee, the full senate and then a possible conference between the Senate and the House of Representatives to bridge gaps, she said.

As such, "the $50 million that the House sub-committee approved is not at all the bottom line," she stressed, adding that even the approval for the $50 million clears the way for "a larger write-off. The figure depends on the technical side of the process."

"The final outcome of the (proposed measure) could very well be very different from what it looks like today," said Ms. Atalla, indicating that the administration would ensure that the full allocation is made in the bill in its final form.

She noted that the very fact that the administration proposed the write-off the entire remainder of the promised cancellation of Jordan's debts in one tranche rather than the previously promised two was a reflection of Washington's commitment and seriousness to live up to its pledge.

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NUCLEAR CARGO: A container is loaded on the British cargo ship Pacific Pintail Thursday in the Port of Cherbourg, France. The ship later left carrying three such containers — one with 15 tonnes of reprocessed nuclear waste, the other two empty. The empty ones will return filled with nuclear waste, which will also be reprocessed at a plant in La Hague, near Cherbourg (AFP photo)

Jordan fully backs Saudi mediation in Gulf dispute

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan has voiced its full support for Saudi Arabia's mediation to resolve a territorial dispute between Bahrain and Qatar and expressed hope that the mediation would be successful and bolster collective Arab action.

A government statement issued on Thursday also noted that the Jordanian support for the Saudi mediation in the dispute stemmed from Jordan's consistent stand that disputes among Arab countries should be settled through inter-Arab efforts.

While the statement did not spell it out, it was an implicit reference to Jordan's stand during the Gulf crisis triggered by the August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait when the Kingdom, as in previous inter-Arab disputes, called for an inter-Arab solution to the crisis and opposed foreign intervention.

Thursday's government statement said:

"The Jordanian government has been following with deep interest the recent developments in the diplomatic efforts spearheaded by Saudi Arabia to end the territorial dispute between (Bahrain and Qatar).

"Settling the dispute within the Arab community will safeguard the national interests of the two sides and

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Arafat back in Gaza after securing Saudi pledge of help

GAZA (Agencies) — Yasser Arafat returned to Gaza from Saudi Arabia on Friday after winning what he said was a promise from King Fahd to ask the United States, Russia and the European Union (EU) to help break a deadlock in Israel-Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) talks.

Mr. Arafat visited Saudi Arabia briefly to seek support for the PLO's international campaign to push Israel towards implementing the stalled next stage of self-rule — Palestinian elections and an Israeli troop redeployment in the West Bank.

"It was fruitful, successful," the PLO chairman and head of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) told reporters at the inauguration of a Norwegian diplomatic mission in Gaza.

Earlier at Cairo airport on his way home, Mr. Arafat said: "The king promised to hold contacts with the sponsors of the peace process (the United States and Russia) and the European Union to move the situation forward."

The Palestinian elections and Israeli redeployment are running eight months behind schedule because of disagreements over the arrangements and Israel's worries about security after a series of suicide bombings by militants.

Mr. Arafat went to Saudi Arabia after a meeting of the PLO's Executive Committee in Cairo that ended Wednesday. The PLO leaders decided to seek international help in breaking the stalemate in negotiations with Israel over expanding Palestinian autonomy beyond the Gaza Strip and Jericho.

Mr. Arafat met King Fahd on Thursday, said Nabil Abu Rudeinah, an Arafat spokesman.

Sources close to Mr. Arafat said the Saudi monarch promised to give the Palestinians $30 million to help Palestinian institutions in east Jerusalem.

Israeli police meanwhile eased a month-long closure of the West Bank on Friday as more than 160,000 Palestinians prayed at Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque under heavy Israeli security.

Some 1,700 police patrolled Jerusalem's walled Old City as the worshippers gathered at Al Aqsa, Islam's third holiest shrine, on the

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Lebanon seeks world help in ending Israeli siege on fishing

BEIRUT (Agencies) — Lebanon appealed to the United States and other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council Friday to pressure Israel into lifting a naval blockade on South Lebanon ports.

Hundreds of Lebanese trampled the U.S. flag and chanted "death to America, the Great Satan" in a parade staged by the Iranian-backed Hizbollah, or Party of God, at which the movement's leaders also threatened to bombard Israeli towns.

Labour Minister Abdullah Al Amin said on Thursday Lebanon could shell Israeli towns and villages if Israel continued to bombard South Lebanon town and villages.

Another minister who declined to be named said on Thursday Beirut feared a major Israeli operation in South Lebanon after recent bombardments of civilian areas and the widening of the fishing blockade against the region's seaports.

The minister said Beirut had begun a flurry of diplomatic contact to stop the situation worsening in the south.

A pro-Syrian minister warned that Lebanon could bomb Israel in retaliation for Israeli shelling.

Labour Minister Abdullah Al Amin's threat coincided with an unprecedented visit to a buffer zone in South Lebanon on Thursday by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and 13 members of his 17-strong cabinet.

"The Lebanese government will shoulder the responsibility of shelling Israeli towns and villages if the Jewish state continues its aggression against Lebanese areas," Mr. Amin said, quoted by the official news agency ANI.

It was not immediately clear if Mr. Amin's threat reflected the policies of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. A source close to the premier declined to comment.

U.S. Charge d'Affaires Ronald Schleicher received the Lebanese appeal at a 30-minute meeting with Foreign Ministry Under-Secretary Zafer Hassan in Beirut.

"All sides are required to exercise restraint and seek ways to ease tensions in South Lebanon," Mr. Schleicher said after the meeting.

The Russian, British, French and Chinese ambassadors later held separate meetings with Mr. Hassan.

The Russian envoy, Guennadi Ilitchev, said Lebanon was not seeking a Security Council meeting, but wants permanent members to persuade Israel to end the blockade, which has deprived 1,300 fishermen of their livelihood.

Israeli gunboats cruised the Mediterranean off Lebanon's southern coast Friday, firing warning shots to keep fishermen in the port cities of Sidon and Tyre and the oil harbour of Zahrani, police reported.

But the blockade on Sidon

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French diplomat doing well after attack in south

By Sa'eda Kilani
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A French diplomat who was shot and wounded by two men Friday noon in the southern area of the Kingdom was recovering in hospital and his condition appeared to be satisfactory, according to Jordanian officials.

Director of the police department Lieutenant General Abdul Rahman Adwan said the assailants were arrested immediately, but he declined to reveal further information on the incident, saying investigations were still under way.

The diplomat, identified in a statement issued by the Ministry of Interior as Second Secretary Gilles Hein, "is doing well, recovering from the injury in hospital," Gen. Adwan told the Jordan Times.

Initial information on the incident were sketchy. Sources told the Jordan Times that it took place in the Al Mujeb valley in the south at noon. While Mr. Hein suffered one gunshot in his abdomen, Mrs. Hein, who was with her husband, was not injured. The two children of the Heins live with their parents in Amman but were not with them at the time of the attack.

It was not immediately clear whether the attack against the diplomat was premeditated but, according to informed sources, the assailants had planned an abduction, and may have found a target in Mr. Hein who happened to be there at the time. Arms were found with the assailants who are believed to be religious extremists, informed sources said.

"Mr. Hein resisted the abduction attempt and was shot in the abdomen in the process," one of the sources said. Another source said the first attempt of abduction was made against Mrs. Hein but was foiled with the interven-

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Afghan balance shifts in favour of Talibans

KABUL (Agencies) — Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani is ready to share power with the emerging Taliban movement but only recognises a symbolic authority in his former opponents, a presidential press spokesman said Friday.

"The Talibans are the side which we should have to deal with, as they are the side with power," Abdul Aziz Morad told journalists here.

He said that the recent defeats in Kabul of the anti-Rabbani alliance headed by faction leaders Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum and Abdul Ali Mazari meant that the alliance was no longer a force of equal power.

"In view of recent transformations, Hekmatyar, Dostum and Mazari are now out of the military and political scene," declared Mr. Morad.

He said that the respective factions Hezb-e-Islami, Junbish-e-Milli and Hezb-e-Wahdat headed by these three leaders, have become marginalised in the Afghan power-play and would have limited say on the United Nations-proposed mechanism for the transfer of power by Mr. Rabbani.

"If they are included in the mechanism, they will just have a symbolic presence," Mr. Morad noted.

Mr. Morad conceded that the Talibans, who have captured nine provincial capitals in the past six months, should not only be included in the U.N.-proposed mechanism but would also ahve a share in the security forces.

"If they demand to come (to Kabul) we are ready to have a joint force, not only for the security of Kabul, but for the whole country as well," Mr. Morad said.

However, Morad did not mean that these new security forces would exclude commanders of other factions. He implied they would have a

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U.S.-French war of words erupts over spying scandal

PARIS (Agencies) — Angrily breaking its silence, the U.S. embassy on Friday accused France's interior minister of lying about events that preceded this week's disclosures of alleged American espionage in France.

Interior Minister Charles Pasqua, who oversees French counterespionage, said he had not intended the U.S. spy affair to become public and suggested there were leaks from "the American side."

"On our part, there was no desire for publicity," he was quoted as saying during a trip to Africa. "All this can be blamed on the United States' delay in resolving the affair."

The U.S. embassy, which had refused all comment since the affair was disclosed Wednesday, lashed back with a highly unusual attack on Mr. Pasqua.

"We categorically reject the allegation that we are responsible for the detailed and totally regrettable press leaks," the statement said. "This charge is neither true nor credible."

"We also regret his inaccurate and incomplete account of his conversations with Mrs. (Pamela) Harriman," the U.S. ambassador.

Mr. Pasqua, briefing reporters Friday in the Ivory Coast, described two meetings with Mrs. Harriman, the first to inform her of the accusations and ask that her government "take the necessary measures without delay."

Two weeks later, he said, Mrs. Harriman informed him that there had been no U.S. government order for any spying to be conducted and indicated there was no move afoot to withdraw the five suspected spies from France.

The U.S. embassy declined to specify what was inaccurate about Mr. Pasqua's account, saying, "such exchanges should have been protected by the rule of diplomatic confidentiality."

The two countries have for two days been trying to play down the spy case, revealed in a leak to Wednesday's Le Monde daily, which said that France was demanding the recall of five U.S. nationals allegedly spying for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) on French economic interests.

Pasqua, speaking to Le Monde Friday, said the spy affair was "very very serious" and sought to blame the United States for the leak, which has until now been widely blamed on his own ministry.

"There were lots of leaks on the American side," he said, adding that the French government had wanted to keep the affair quiet. "There is no desire for publicity on our part," he told Le Monde's Dakar correspondent.

A short time later, talking to the press in Abidjan where he was beginning a three-day tour of African states, he went further in his attack on the United States.

He said it was "abnormal for the foreign services of a friendly power to conduct spying operations aimed notably at recruiting high ranking civil servants to possibly

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Russians hit Chechens outside Grozny

ARGUN, Russia (Agencies) — Russian artillery battered Chechen positions on the outskirts of Grozny on Friday using mortars, howitzers and multiple-barrelled rocket launchers to block rebel routes into the capital, witnesses said.

"The first part of last night was very heavy here but it got quieter in the early morning hours," said Aslambek Ismalov, a Chechen commander in Argun, east of Grozny.

"The Russians are shelling places closer to Grozny now, trying to keep our fighters getting in... our turn will come later," he told reporters.

Moscow's troops cut the last major highway into Grozny on Tuesday, completing their encirclement of the city more than two months after being sent in to crush the breakaway republic's bid for independence.

Since then fighting has spread to towns and villages in outlying areas, from which the Chechen resistance is still infiltrating snipers and commando squads into Grozny.

Argun's deserted streets were relatively quiet on Friday, but big Russian guns were clearly audible to the west along the Restov-Baku highway as they poured fire onto Chechen positions.

Interfax news agency quoted Chechen sources as saying at least 10 armoured vehicles were moving along the main road out of Grozny to the south-west towards the town of Urus-Martan, a centre of opposition to rebel Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev.

Not every Chechen town has gone to war against the Russians. Goity, 13 kilometres south of the capital, was trying to remain neutral despite, having been shelled several times by the Russians this week.

In an attempt not to provoke Moscow's troops, armed residents were turning away fighters from other parts of Chechenya as they tried to pass through the town from frontline positions overnight.

Russian military prosecutors in Grozny have charged servicemen with theft, robbery and looting following seven incidents, the deputy chief military prosecutor, Stanislav Gaveto, said.

Quoted by Interfax, he said other criminal charges under investigation included "negligent handling of weapons leading to a serviceman's death or injury" and negligence leading to traffic accidents.

The charges were the first reported by the authorities since Russian forces began attacking the Chechen Capital over the New Year's weekend. They finally took control of most of the city in mid-February.

Residents of Grozny claim that Russian soldiers are running amok there, looting, beating people up and sometimes murdering them. Some say the soldiers have occupied their homes and refuse to leave.

The rebels say they will eventually take their fight to the mountains in the south of the region. Russian air force chief Pyotr Deinekin told Interfax news agency his planes were capable of pin-point bombing of mountain strongholds if necessary.

The campaign to halt Chechenya's three-year-old independence drive has proved deeply unpopular among most Russians and raised voices of protest abroad.

But a top U.S. official on Thursday strongly defended a generous aid package for the

Follow-up panel to draw up plans for Jordan-Iraq industrial relations

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Jordanian and Iraqi industrialists have agreed to set up a joint committee to work out specifics in industrial cooperation between the two sides and follow-up a memorandum of understanding they signed in Baghdad last week, an advisor to the Amman Chamber of Industry said Friday.

Ali Dajani, the advisor emphasised that the envisaged Jordanian-Iraqi cooperation would in no way violate the international sanctions imposed on Iraq in August 1990 following that country's invasion of Kuwait.

"We are fully committed to and are abiding by the sanctions against Iraq, and have no intention whatsover to contravene the terms of the sanctions," Mr. Dajani told the Jordan Times. "The cooperation that we expect between Jordn and Iraq will be strictly within the framework of the exemptions granted from the sanctions."

"Any interpretations to the contrary will be simply meaningless and without substance," he added.

Mr. Dajani was commenting on the memorandum signed by an Amman Chamber of Industry with the Iraqi Federation of Industries and Federation of Chambers Industries and Commerce in Baghdad last week.

The memorandum of understanding calls for cooperation in the fields of industry, food, textile and construction.

"The memorandum also stipulates that Jordanian industries would advise Iraqi industries on rebuilding and reoperating some of the factories which are no longer operative," said Mr. Dajani. "The involvement of Jordnian industries in this context would be strictly in an advisory capacity."

Some of the industries are also military facilities which are being converted for civilian use after they were rendered obsolete in their present form following Iraq's complicance with the U.N. terms of the ceasefire that ended the Gulf war over Kuwait in early 1991.

A businessman cited an example: "There is a large number of clothing establishments affiliated with the Iraqi military. These used to produce uniforms for the Iraqi armed forces. With the reduction of the numerical strength of the Iraqi army, some of these facilities are rendered obsoltete, and Jordanians could advise the Iraqis on how to make use of the extra capacity that is available."

The joint committee that was agreed upon will be formed after an Amman Chamber of Commerce delegation visits Iraq next month, Mr. Dajani said.

"There will be close coordination between the Amman Chamber of Industry and the Amman Chamber of Commerce on the one hand and the Iraqis on the other," he said.

Mr. Dajani said he was not aware of any Amman Chamber of Industry plans to hold an exhibition of Jordanian industiral products in Baghdad in April as reported by the Baghdad Observer.

"The Amman Chamber of Industry is planning a national exhibition in Amman in May to mark the occasion of Jordan's Independence day," he said. "Iraqis will be invited to the exhibition. Beyond that, I am not aware of any plans to hold a Jordanian exhibition in Baghdad as reported."

Khaldoun Abu Hassan, president of the Amman Chamber of Industry, led the delegation to the visit to Iraq. The delegation returned home late Wednesday.

The memorandum signed in Baghdad is largely seen as a landmark accord that ensures a key Jordanian role in Iraq after the sanctions are eased/lifted to allow some of the envisaged cooperation.

It was also a key achievement in particular for the Jordanian industrial sector, which has been watching with apprehension the steady flow of international trade delegations to Baghdad through Amman and reports of "billions of dollars" worth of "post-sanctions" contracts being discussed in Baghdad.

In talks that the delegation held in Baghdad, it was also agreed that Iraq would increase its post-sanctions imports from Jordan. While little elaboration was available on this count, it was taken to mean that Iraq would direct its post-sanctions orders to Jordan for products that it is now getting from Turkey and Iran.

No definite statistics are available on the flow of such Turkish and Iranian products as well as goods from elsewhere but channelled through the northern and eastern neighbours of Iraq. Both Ankara and Tehran deny charges that Turks and Iranians are violating the sanctions and would release little statistics except to say that their exports to Iraq are strictly food and medicine.

Under Arafat's rule, Gaza economy took turn for worse

GAZA CITY (AP) — In the euphoric days after the 1993 peace agreement with Israel, Palestinian factory owner Maher Reqayyik could barely keep up with demand for his Yasser Arafat drinking glasses.

But in the past few months, sales have stopped, along with the hopes that Mr. Arafat would bring prosperity to improverished Gaza.

"They don't want him anymore," Mr. Reqayyik said of Mr. Arafat. "He hasn't brought them any money."

Since the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) took control of Gaza in May, unemployment soared to 60 per cent, rents doubled and the value of all goods and services sold in the Strip fell by 15 per cent from $1 billion a year.

The slump is not only due to Palestinian inefficiency. Israeli restrictions have prevented Palestinian workers and products from reaching Israel and millions of dollars in aid pledged by foreign governments never came.

U.N. officials warned of violence among Gaza's 800,000 people if the downward spin continues.

"Hope is withering away... and there may be an explosion on the ground," said Terje Larsen, the U.N. coordinator for Gaza.

"Living conditions are much worse today than in 1993," said Mr. Larsen, a Norwegian who helped set up the secret talks that led to the 1993 autonomy accord.

Even projects proudly initiated by Mr. Arafat as symbols of Gaza's rebirth have failed.

Shortly after he arrived in July, Mr. arafat said he would personally help build one-pier "Gaza port," using his skills as an engineer. But a metal framework set up collapsed in the winter storms and has turned red with rust.

Foreign governments pledged $700 million for 1994 but disbursed only $240 million. Most of the money was spent to cover 40,000 salaries, including those of 9,000 police officers.

The donors withheld the bulk of the money because the Palestinians refused to set up accounting procedures. Mr. Larsen also cited Palestinian infighting over projects and money.

Mr. Larsen said the donors also made mistakes, focusing on long-term rather than short-term projects that immediately create jobs.

"The year 1994 was a year of learning, maybe it was a year of failure," said Mr. Larsen.

Last week, Mr. Arafat's government and the donors set up a new system they hope will finally get the money flowing. In all, world governments pledged $2.4 billion over five years.

Twelve groups were set up for different areas of the economy, and in each group, one donor country is in charge and has a specific Palestinian partner.

But Palestinian economist Khaled Abdul Shafi said the Arafat government cannot rely on foreign aid alone and must do more to attract private investors.

Business people find it difficult to cope with Gaza's crumbling infrastructure. The telephone utility is so small that those who applied for a line 10 years ago are still waiting. Most roads are bumpy and there are almost daily power outages.

Mr. Abdul Shafi said Israeli closures of the West Bank and Gaza Strip also contributed to Gaza's troubles.

Israel imposed the latest travel ban on Jan. 22, after 21 Israelis were killed in a suicide bombing by militants.

For every day of closure, Gaza loses some $3 million in wages of 23,000 labourers and exports to Israel, Mr. Abdul Shafi said.

Palestinians complain that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's new policy of eventually keeping Palestinians out of Israel for good violates the Israel-PLO economic agreement based on open borders.

Christopher to visit Mideast in 'near future'

WASHINGTON (USIA) — Secretary of State Warren Christopher expects to go to the Middle East in the "relatively near future," according to his top assistant on the Middle East peace process. But, he said an announcement will be made when the "final" decision on the trip is made.

Dennis B. Ross, the special Middle East peace coordinator, discussed the secretary's travel plans on Thursday at an on-the-record briefing before the Foreign Correspondents Association at the National Press Club. He did not have any opening remarks.

At the State Department noon briefing, the acting spokesman said that "March is a likely time frame" for the Christopher trip.

The secretary of state visited the Middle East last December and his projected trip to the region comes at a time when Syrian-Israeli talks and Israel-Palestinian negotiations appear to be at a standstill.

Complicating the atmosphere in the area is the unresolved issue of Egypt's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty unless Israel endorses the accord as well. The treaty is up for renewal next April.

Although he emphasised that he was not dismissing the problems, Mr. Ross explained, it was easy for some to lose sight of the achievements to date. What is "striking" about the current climate in the region is that there is a "continuing commitment to negotiations... and to solve the problems in the negotiations," he stressed.

At one point he told a questioner that there is no magic wand to capture a solution. "The challenge for us is to make it easier for the sides, regardless of the tracks, to overcome differences..." He added that the United States is going to do whatever it can.

As regards the issue of Israel's nuclear capability, Mr. Ross also noted that Egypt and Israel had "meaningful" discussions when Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres met his counterpart in Egypt February 23. Ross pointed out that both agreed to pursue talks at a later stage.

Mr. Ross also affirmed that Saudi Arabia has been "supportive, committed and determined to do whatever (it) can" to move the Mideast peace process forward.

He concluded that for the peace process to work, there must be tangible progress whereby the expectations of the parties are fulfilled.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hanoi orders probe into Lebanon 'slave' scandal

HANOI (AFP) — Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet has ordered an investigation after women sent to work in hotels in Lebanon ended up living in virtual slave-labour conditions as maids in private houses, a report said Friday. Women sent to Lebanon to work as waitresses, hotels staff or in factories had instead been forced to become household servants and were treated brutally by their employers, the Tuoi Tre newspaper said. A government agency in charge of sending labourers overseas had called on companies to stop sending workers to Lebanon following charges of abuse made by women who recently returned here, the newspaper said. Press reports said that the women had reportedly been forced to work long hours and were subjected to beatings and confinement. Living conditions in the households were poor and correspondence with home restricted. Several had written from Lebanon asking for the government to help them escape from "this hell," the newspaper said. A manager for a company that had been sending workers there said any who were unhappy with their jobs would be helped to return. But she said there had been no complaints.

Members of underground Turkish group arrested

ISTANBUL (AP) — Eight alleged members of an underground Islamic fundamentalist group have been arrested in connection with a series of bombing attacks, police said Thursday. Authorities said the eight were members of the Great Eastern Islamic Raiders, which has been implicated in 32 bombings in Istanbul over the past 12 months. Two people were killed in those attacks. Among those arrested was Kazim Albayrak, editor of a magazine that has called for a holy war to topple Turkey's secular system. The arrests in several neighbourhoods of this metropolis of 10 million during the past few days netted three automatic weapons, three handguns, one hand grenade and six pipe bombs, police said. Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise in Turkey, a predominantly Muslim but secular country. The fundamentalist Welfare party doubled its votes in local elections last March, capturing many mayorships, including Ankara, the capital, and Istanbul, Turkey's biggest city.

Turkish premier to visit Japan

ANKARA (AP) — Prime Minister Tansu Ciller will seek wider economic ties with Japan during an official visit starting Sunday. Ms. Ciller's government has faced difficulty in finding foreign credits. Japanese loans came to a halt last year after Turkey's credibility rate dropped in the international markets. Turkey expects Japanese businessmen to expand their investments in this country where the Toyota car manufacturer and Bridgestone tyre makers are already engaged in joint venture productions. Turkey has recently become popular among Japanese travellers. About 63,000 Japaneses visited Turkey last year, up from 42,000 the previous year.

Former Cypriot minister dies

NICOSIA (AP) — Former government minister George Ioannides has died. He was 71. Ioannides died Thursday night in Nicosia general hospital after a heart attack, the Cyprus News Agency said. He was a close associate of the island republic's founding father, Archbishop Makarios, who died in 1977. Throughout the 1970s, Ioannides held the posts of justice minister, interior minister and minister to the president.

JIC to sell shares in most hotels

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The government plans to sell its shares in most of the hotels in the country this year and channel the proceeds to fresh ventures, a senior official has said.

The first step in this direction was taken when the Jordan Investment Corporation (JIC), the agency that guides state investments in commercial ventures, offered its 87.7 per cent stake in Amman's landmark Inter.Continental Hotel to the private sector late last year.

Other offers planned this year by the corporation include its 33 per cent equity in the Philadelphia Hotel, 32 per cent in the Amman Marriott Hotel and 43 per cent in Aqaba's Coral Beach Hotel, said Mohammad Batayneh, director-general of the JIC.

"We are determined to eliminate our present involvement in commercial ventures in the tourism sector and use the capital proceeds (from the sale of present holdings) into fresh ventures," Mr. Batayneh told the Jordan Times.

"We intend to sell our shares in some of the major hotels in Amman this year," he said, listing the Philadelphia, Marriot and Coral Beach as those which are expected to go on the bloc soon.

The new ventures where the corporation wants to invest, he said, involve not only the tourism sector but also industry and other sectors. He did not elaborate.

Mr. Batayneh said the corporation was expected to finalise its acceptance of a private sector offer to buy 54 per cent of the Jordan Inter-.Continental in "a few days."

The offer, which came in response to a JIC invitation for bids, involves two million of the 3.2 million JIC shares in the Jordan Hotels and Tourism Company. The Jordan Hotels and Tourism Company, whose capital is spread in 3.66 million shares with a par value of JD 1, owns the Inter.Continental Hotel; the 382-room hotel located in the heart of Amman is the only commercial entity owned by the company.

The private sector already holds the rest of the shares — 12.3 per cent — of the Jordan Hotels and Tourism Company.

The Inter.Continental is operated by the London-based Inter.Continental chain under an agreement that expires in 2002.

Mr. Batayneh said the offer for the Inter.Continental was made by a local group led by Zara Investment Corporation and including "several local and Arab investors" whom he did not identify. He corrected reports that the group was offering around JD 10.50 each for the two million shares.

"The offer we have received — that is going to be finalised and accepted by the board of directors of the JIC in the next few days — is JD 7.2 per share," he said. This would mean JD 14.4 million for two million shares, he noted.

Mr. Batayneh said the corporation had received some offers for the rest of the JIC shares — 1.2 million — but had not made up its mind. "The (Zara-led) offer was by far the highest bid we received, and we want to settle the deal first" before considering other offers, he said.

However, the JIC would like to complete the process of sale of the Inter.Continental soon, he said, implying the corporation would also like to place the Philadelphia, Marriot and Coral Beach stakes in the market soon.

Arafat inventing foiled bombings — Hamas

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat's security apparatus is making up reports of foiled suicide bombings just to satisfy Israeli demands for a crackdown, a Hamas leader charged Friday.

Mahmoud Zahhar said a young supporter of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, was detained and pressured to fabricate a story about being ordered to go on a suicide mission.

The intelligence forces "applied psychological and physical pressure on me, and I couldn't bear it ... so I began inventing stories," Dr. Zahhar quoted 15-year-old Musa Ziadeh as saying.

"I told them two masked men asked me to go on a suicide mission. After more pressure to get their names, I mentioned two names," Ziadeh wrote in a report read out at Palestine Mosque before some 1,500 Hamas supporters.

Mohammad Al Sayyed, a Koranic teacher, and Khaled Eissa, a mosque preacher, were later arrested.

But the youth's father, Hisham, insisted his son's confessions were true, and said he was to have blown himself up using eight kilogrammes of TNT explosive in Israel on Feb. 14.

He said his son had prepared a will, which contained Sheikh Eissa's name, and which asked his parents not to cry for him.

"The authorities did not force him to talk."

"I asked them to apply some pressure on him but not much, because he had to talk," he said.

His son provided details of the planned TNT explosion, which was to be one in a string of suicide bombings. After Ziadeh's first release early this month, a Hamas activist in a white car drove up to the house and told him the plan had been called off.

Further investigation showed that about six other youths were to be next in line, and police have now placed them under house supervision, Hisham said.

"They've jailed Musa again because after his release, Hamas brainwashed him again and forced him to renege on his statements," he said explaining the statement, Dr. Zahhar read.

"I hope they keep him until be gets all those ideas out of his mind."

Hisham, whose brother works for Palestinian intelligence, said young Ziadeh had joined Hamas about three years ago. He first became suspicious when his son disappeared for days at a time two months ago.

Albright trip to urge retention of U.N. sanctions on Iraq

UNITED NATIONS — U.S. Ambassador Madeleine Albright will visit several member-countries of the U.N. Security Council for meetings with top officials aimed at ensuring that sanctions against Iraq remain in place until Baghdad is in full compliance with the U.N. ceasefire demands.

The trip, which was announced Thursday by the White House and by the U.S. mission to the United Nations, was scheduled to begin later that day.

White House Press Secretary Mike McCurry, in a written statement, said President Bill Clinton has asked Albright to consult "at each stop regarding the best means of ensuring Iraq's full compliance with its obligations as established by the United Nations."

A U.S. official at the United Nations said the ambassador, who will be accompanied by a ten-person delegation, will visit Britain, Italy, the Czech Republican, Oman, Argentina, and Honduras. Her first scheduled meetings are with British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd and Botswana Foreign Minister Gaositwe K.T. Chiepe in London.

Ms. Albright will carry a message from the president of the United States expressing "the determination of our government to make sure that sanctions are not prematurely lifted on Iraq, the U.S. official said.

"The goal," he said, "is that as a result of this trip, and other efforts, there will be a large group of countries who would not support any such effort."

One of the periodic reviews of Iraqi compliance with Security Council ceasefire resolutions is scheduled for early March.

The main thrust of the U.S. message is that "in light of the fact that Iraq's compliance has been grudging and incomplete, any lifting of sanctions or talk of lifting sanctions would only encourage noncompliance rather than promote compliance," the official said.

The official noted that Ms. Albright met with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl earlier this month and discussed the issue at length, so she will not visit Germany on this trip. She also has no plans to visit the other Security Council member-countries — France, Russia, China, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Indonesia.

The ambassador will not be visiting France or Russia because "their views have been well-known for some time — they disagree with our views, so there's no point," the U.S. official said.

France and Russia have been pressing the council to begin easing the sanctions as a reward for the steps Iraq has taken, especially cooperating with the U.N. Special Commission overseeing the destruction of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (UNSCOM). The two countries would like the council to set a date for the lifting of the oil embargo after the long-term monitoring system has been operational for six months and certified by UNSCOM Chairman Rolf Ekeus.

Iraq's cooperation with UNSCOM is important to the United States, the official pointed out, but the U.S. position on sanctions is not based solely on the destruction of Iraq's weapons

"Our position on sanctions on Iraq," he said, "is based on a judgement call the United States believes the council should make about Iraqi intentions, and those intentions are determined by their behaviour across the board — including the deployment of forces in the south last October, including the refusal to return Kuwaiti equipment, including the refusal to provide an accounting of Kuwaiti prisoners, including the refusal to renounce terrorism, including the refusal to stop repression against the Kurds in the north and the Shi'ite in the south.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel: 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

17:00 ..... Cocotte Minutes
17:30 ..... Que Le Meilluer Gagne
18:00 ..... Marion N1
19:00 ..... News in French
19:15 ..... Fa Ut Pas Revera
19:30 ..... Ramadan in the World
19:55 ..... You Bet Your Life
20:10 Movies, Games, and Videos
21:15 ..... The Cape Rebel
22:10 ..... News in English
22:30 "Another Pair of Aces: Three of Kind"
23:59 ..... Stay the Night

PRAYER TIMES

04:48 ..... Fajr
06:05 ..... *(Sunrise) Duha*
11:49 ..... Dhuhr
15:02 ..... 'Asr
17:32 ..... Maghreb
18:50 ..... 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Swefieh, Tel. 810740

Assemblies of God Church, Tel. 632785.

St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590.

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.

De la Salle Church Tel. 661757

Terrasancta Church Tel: 622366

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 623541.

Anglican Church Tel. 630851, Tel. 628543.

Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331.

Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261.

St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.

Amman International Church Tel. 652526.

Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel: 824328.

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 684195

The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932

Church of Nazarene Tel.675691.

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.

It will be warm and sunny with temperatures continuing to rise and winds variable. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp.

Amman ..... 4 / 19
Aqaba ..... 10 / 25
Deserts 1/ 20
Jordan Valley ..... 9 / 23

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 17, Aqaba 23 Humidity readings: Amman 24 per cent, Aqaba 31 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Hanna Mansour 750197
Dr. Ratib Zaitoun 888685
Dr. Mahmoud Amireh 888883
Dr. Abdul Rahim Mustafa 744685
Firas pharmacy 661912
Ferdows pharmacy 778336
Al Asema pharmacy 637055
Nairoukh pharmacy 623672
Al Salam pharmacy 636730
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660
Najib pharmacy 847632

IRBID:
Dr. Ali Al Shoqairi 246140
Alquds pharmacy ..... (—)

ZARQA:
Dr. Rajih Saqr 901290
Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390
Public Security Department 630321
Hotel Complaints 605800
Price Complaints 661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs 661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 680100
Jordan Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Company 636381
RJ Flight Information 08-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre 813813/32
Khalidi Maternity, J. Amn 644281/6
Akileh Maternity, J. Amn. 642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malhas, J. Amman 636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 664171/4
Shmeisani Hospital 669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Muasher Hospital 667227/9
The Islamic, Abdali 666127/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali 664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen ... 777101/3
Al-Bashir, J. Ashrafieh 775111/26
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 602240/50
Amal Hospital 674155

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital ..... (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital ..... (02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital (02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital ..... (02)247100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital ..... (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

05:45 ..... Jakarta, Singapore (RJ)
09:15 ..... Aqaba (RJ)
09:40 ..... New Delhi (RJ)
09:55 ..... Karachi, Dubai (RJ)
10:15 ..... Beirut (RJ)
10:25 ..... Colombo (RJ)
15:00 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:45 ..... Frankfurt, Vienna (RJ)
16:50 ..... Cairo (RJ)
17:55 ..... London, Berlin (RJ)
20:20 ..... Kuala Lumpur (RJ)
03:15 ..... London, Aqaba (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

04:20 ..... Vienna (OS)
16:10 ..... Rome, Damascus (AZ)
18:15 ..... Dubai (EK)
19:00 ..... Sanaa (IY)
19:05 ..... Larnaca (CY)
21:55 ..... Paris, Damascus (AF)
22:00 ..... Cairo (MS)
22:45 ..... London (BA)
23:05 ..... Athens (OA)
23:20 ..... Amsterdam (KL)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

06:25 ..... Beirut (RJ)
07:00 ..... Aqaba (RJ)
09:15 Aqaba, Kuala Lumpur (RJ)
11:15 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
11:15 ..... Geneva, Madrid (RJ)
11:40 ..... Paris, Brussels (RJ)
12:00 ..... London (RJ)
12:45 ..... Cairo (RJ)
19:45 ..... Bahrain, Doha (RJ)
20:05 ..... Larnaca (RJ)
20:30 ..... Joddah (RJ)
20:40 ..... Damascus (RJ)
21:45 ..... Aqaba, Vienna (RJ)
21:25 ..... Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
04:10 ..... London (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

07:30 ..... Larnaca, Rome (AZ)
07:45 ..... Beirut (ME)
13:50 ..... Vienna (OS)
19:15 ..... Dubai (EK)
20:00 ..... Sanaa (IY)
22:00 ..... Larnaca (CY)
23:00 ..... Cairo (MS)
23:59 ..... Damascus, Paris (AF)
00:20 ..... Amsterdam (KL)
02:35 ..... London (BA)
02:40 ..... Athens (OA)

HIJAZ RAILWAY TRAIN

Dep. Amman ... 8:00 a.m. every Monday
Arr. Damascus 5:00 p.m. every Monday
Dep. Damascus 7:30 a.m. every Sunday
Arr. Amman .... 5:00 p.m. every Sunday

MARKET PRICES

Upper/lower price in fils per kg.

Apple	700/ 400
Banana	600
Banana (Mukammar)	620
Cabbage	130 / 60
Carrot	180/100
Cauliflower	120/ 60
Cucumbers (large)	150 / 100
Cucumbers (small)	320 / 220
Eggplant	170/ 100
Garlic	1100/800
Grape Fruit	270 / 200
Green Beanse	500 / 400
Lemon	280 / 200
Marrow (large)	150 / 100
Marrow (small)	280 / 200
Onion (green)	250/ 150
Onion (dry)	340/ 200
Orange	420/320
Pepper (hot)	900 / 700
Pepper (sweet)	450 / 300
Potato	330/ 230
Radish	150 / 100
Spinach	120/ 60
String Beans	900 / 700
Tomato	210/120

Home

FRIDAY PRAYERS H
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Queen a of Sabri

AMMAN (J.T.) — Und
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Maqamat, Mawawee
Adwar, Halabi Kodou
Nabawi praises and oth
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Queen Noor, wh

Computer market po

By Ian Atalla
Special to the Jordan Tim

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Besides small size, oth
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customs policies and lack
copyright protection for so
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"Customs officers are u
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such as automobiles," s

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☆ Play (in Arabic) entit
"You Are Not Yourse
at the Royal Cultural C
tre on Thursday at 9
p.m.
EXHIBITIONS
☆ Display of Bani Ham
new designs of rugs at
Bani Hamida House, J

FRIDAY PRAYERS: **His Majesty King Hussein and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan attend Friday prayers at the Hamzeh Ben Abdul Muttaleb Mosque in Amman. Sheikh Mustafa Rufati, who delivered the sermon, called for intensifying efforts to turn Jordan into a model for the region, thus contributing to achieving the principles which King Hussein has continuously upheld. Also attending the last Friday prayers of the Holy Month of Ramadan were Their Royal Highnesses Prince Abdullah, Faisal and Ali, Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker, the speakers of the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament, Royal Court Chief Marwan Al Qasem, the King's advisors, Chief of Chamberlain Prince Ra'd Ben Zeid and his son Prince Firas, the private chamberlain, Prince Hassan's special advisor and senior military and civil officials.**

Arab-Israeli meeting on displaced Palestinians postponed; no new date set — senior official

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — An Arab-Israeli meeting scheduled to be held in Amman on Sunday on the repatriation of displaced Palestinians has been postponed, and no new date has been set, a senior official said Friday.

Assem Ghosheh, director of the Department of Palestinian Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, added, however, that he was not aware of the precise reason for the postponement.

"I was informed by the Foreign Minister (Abdul Karim Kabariti) last week that the meeting was postponed under a decision taken in the (Feb. 12) Washington meeting," Mr. Ghosheh told the Jordan Times.

"No new date has been set as of today (Friday)."

The Washington meeting, which grouped the foreign ministers of Jordan, Egypt and Israel and a senior representative of the Palestine National Authority (PNA), was convened with a view to seeking means to address the troubled Middle East peace process, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian track of negotiations.

According to local columnists and analysts, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres wanted the meeting on the displaced persons deferred. The Israeli stand, according to the analysts and columnists, came when Mr. Peres saw that Jordan, Egypt and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)-led PNA had coordinated their positions ahead of the meeting.

Such an Arab coordination would have meant heavy pressure on Israel to fully adhere to the commitment on the displaced Palestinians it undertook in the Declaration of Principles (DoP) it signed with the PLO in September 1993.

Jordan, Egypt and the PLO held a meeting in early February in Cairo to coordinate their stands.

They drew up a set of priorities and classifications of the displaced persons and agreed to present a joint approach to the Israelis during the Amman meeting.

"Israel did not appear to have prepared itself for such an eventuality where the three Arab parties would have a joint stand," said a seasoned observer.

"Obviously, it was hoping that Israel and the PLO would be on one side of the table with Jordan and Egypt on the other rather than facing all the three Arab parties across the table."

Under the DoP, the main issue on the table for the meeting on the displaced persons would be the modalities and mechanisms for the repatriation of these people rather than any debate on the very essence of repatriation or the right of the displaced persons to return home.

"There is no question of any fresh negotiations on the right of the displaced persons to return home," said a Jordanian official. "Israel has undertaken to respect the rights of the displaced persons to return to their homeland, and the only issue that will be discussed at the proposed meeting will be how to organise their return."

Mr. Ghosheh told the Jordan Times that "no new date has been set for the meeting" but that the Jordanian side had prepared itself to present the Kingdom's perceptions of the repatriation of the displaced at any time.

The Jordanian priority, according to officials, is to formulate a "clear mechanism" that would ensure the "orderly return" of the displaced persons starting with the Palestinians stranded in Jordan after their Israeli-issued exit and entry permits expired in the years after 1967, "family reunifications" and the return of those who were actually displaced in the 1967 war.

The officials say that while the sequence of the return of the three categories should be in that order, they do not see any reason that they could not take place simultaneously under a predetermined time-table.

Queen attends performance of Sabri Mudallal ensemble

AMMAN (J.T.) — Under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Noor, the National Music Conservatory of the Noor Al Hussein Foundation held an iftar followed by a performance featuring Syrian Sheikh of chanting Sabri Mudallal and the Ensemble of Heritage at the Inter-Continental Hotel, according to a Royal Court statement.

Mr. Mudallal and his ensemble sang Muwashahat, Maqamat, Mawaweel, Adwar, Halabi Kodoud, Nabawi praises and other songs from the rich musical heritage of the Arab World at the Thursday night event, the statement said..

Queen Noor, who attended the performance, talked with Mr. Mudallal and his ensemble and thanked them for transforming the evening into a special musical experience that is uniquely Arab, said the statement.

Sabri Mudallal's ensemble, which was established in 1954, has performed in various Arab and European festivals such as the 1985 Autumn Festival in Paris, the 1985 Festival of Arab Music Days in France, the 1985 Asian Arts Festival in Hong Kong, the 1988 European tour, the 1993 Mediterranean Song Festival in Greece, the 1993 International Festival of Arab Music in Beirut and the 1993 Festival at the Institute of the Arab World in Paris.

Sheikh Mudallal learnt the art of chanting at the age of 12 under Omar Batsh, the Syrian sheikh of artists at that time.

He joined the Syria Radio Station when it was established in 1942 and remained there until 1954.

In addition to being the Syrian sheikh of chanting, he is a composer of 38 popular chants to date.

Queen Noor, said the statement, was received by Senator Leila Sharaf, Mrs. Hind Nasser, Mr. Kifah Fakhouri, the director of the National Music Conservatory, and the committee members of the conservatory.

Slovakian delegation ends visit opening door for trade links

AMMAN (J.T.) — A Slovakian delegation, led by Peter Mihok, Friday wound up a three-day visit to Jordan during which its members met with business community leaders and Jordanian officials to discuss promotion of economic and trade ties.

Mr. Mihok, who is head of the Slovakian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, on Thursday signed an agreement paving the ground for mutual cooperation mainly in trade, joint investments, services and economic affairs.

Under the agreement, which was signed by Haidar Murad, chairman of the Federation of Jordanian Chambers of Commerce, both sides pledged to back the work of societies, organisations and companies in either country trying to establish trade and economic links between Jordan and Slovakia and remove trade obstacles.

They also pledged to take measures leading to joint trade fairs, the exchange of visits by concerned groups and to hold consultations and organise conferences to achieve these goals.

They also agreed to exchange information on market situations, and publications regarding trade and economic fields.

Before the signing of the agreement, Mr. Murad held talks with the Slovak delegation to discuss prospects for promoting trade between the two countries, Jordan's central geographic location and prospects for promoting trade in the region.

Retired servicemen expect Cabinet announcement on pension raises

AMMAN (J.T.) — Following His Majesty King Hussein's directives to the government to speed up work on raising the pension of retired servicemen, the central committee overseeing servicemen's affairs expects the government to announce its decision on the increments this week, according to retired Brigadier Aref Utaibi.

Mr. Utaibi, who heads the central council committee set up by the Jordanian Economic and Social Organisation of Retired Servicemen (JESORS), told the Jordan Times Friday that a Finance Ministry team entrusted with drawing up the plan has finalised its work and will submit it to the Cabinet for approval.

He said the plan was expected to include meaningful increases in retired officers' and soldiers' pensions.

Last December, the government announced that officers and soldiers retiring after Dec. 1, 1994 would receive an increase of JD 25 and JD 22.5 respectively on their pensions. The government excluded all those who had retired before December 1994.

Brig. Utaibi led JESORS representatives in appealing to King Hussein and Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker who pledged immediate action towards raising the pension of all retired servicemen.

The Finance Ministry is keeping a tight lid on the margin of the expected increases in servicemen's pension until the plan has been endorsed by the cabinet, said Brig. Utaibi.

Brig. Utaibi and his committee last week met with Finance Minister Basel Jardaneh to discuss the increases in the course of the committee's drive to ensure sizeable raises for the retired servicemen.

Bosnian Serbs detain Jordanian reporter

SARAJEVO (R) — Bosnian Serb forces detained a Jordanian journalist at a road checkpoint near Sarajevo airport on Thursday, a United Nations military spokesman reported.

The woman, Shanwat Nahrawan, was being held in the Serb-controlled suburb of Ilidza and it appeared that she would stay in detention overnight, said Lieutenant-Colonel Gary Coward.

(According to Jordan Press Association (JPA) sources, Ms. Nahrawan is a Yugoslav journalist married to a Jordanian and holding dual nationality.)

She and an Egyptian reporter were being driven by two U.N. military observers from the airport to the Bosnian government-held city centre when Bosnian Serb soldiers stopped the vehicle at midday, he said.

The two U.N. observers, one of whom was Egyptian, and the Egyptian journalist were freed after about three hours, he said. U.N. civilian police were now trying to secure Ms. Nahrawan's release.

CSC to offer 2% of new jobs to qualified handicapped persons

AMMAN Petra) — The Civil Service Commission (CSC) intends to see that two per cent of government office jobs created in 1995 offered to qualified handicapped persons, according to CSC President Abdullah Ulayyan.

Mr. Ulayyan said in a statement Friday that the CSC will seek Cabinet reaffirmation that the Jordanian law governing the care of the handicapped (which allows for the unemployment of disabled people) is implemented.

As soon as the government gives the green light, expected this month, to the CSC to fill vacant or newly-created civil service positions, the commission would begin selecting eligible persons, he said.

Mr. Ulayyan added that 2,750 new jobs have been created in various ministries and departments: 1,700 within the Ministry of Education; 700 in the Ministry of Health; and the remainder to other departments.

The CSC plans to assign 200 jobs to qualified persons from needy families and whose qualifications and training conform to the principles and terms set by the Public Administrative Development Council.

The CSC has received 150 applications since the beginning of this year to be studied by the CSC board before a decision to appoint them is taken.

As a matter of policy, the CSC will appoint sons and daughters of Jordanian martyrs whenever possible.

Computer products dealers discuss market potential at American show

By Ian Atalla
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordan's computer market is cramped to say the least, according to Zeid Nasser of Byte magazine, a computer technology monthly.

"We sell around 1,000 copies per issue here, and we don't think the market will allow for more," said the Byte sales representative. Meanwhile Byte, a five-month-old newcomer to the Middle East, has already managed to sell "six to seven times that amount" in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. "That tells you how small the computer market in Jordan really is."

Small or not, the local market does not seem to lack ambition, if a visit to the two-day American Computer Show was any indication. Twenty-one Jordanian companies and dealerships, at least 15 of them less than a decade old, and 11 of them non-existent before 1990, crowded the showroom at the Philadelphia Hotel on Thursday and Friday.

"Certainly, not all these firms are going to make it," said Mahmoud Salameh, marketing director for Mirage Information Technology Group, maintaining that all the newcomers were too much for the market to handle.

Besides small size, other factors add to the market's toughness, dealers said. Two issues they mentioned more than once were government customs policies and lack of copyright protection for software.

"Customs officers are used to setting rates on products with slowly changing prices, such as automobiles," said Ramzi Zeine, managing director of STS. "They have not gotten used to volatile pricing where changes occur every two or three weeks, as is the case with the computer industry."

As for copyright protection of computer products in Jordan, "it's a major concern," said A. Majied Qasem, an engineer for Access. Although the Kingdom has sufficient legislation in the books to provide solid protection, he said, "it isn't being applied."

Thus, he maintained, Jordan had some possibilities of competing as a development and export centre for software in the Middle East, but local merchants were hesitant to jump into this potentially lucrative aspect of the computer trade.

"You can't afford to spend all the time and money needed to bring in experts and develop a software package, and then see only two copies sold before it gets pirated," Mr. Qasem said.

Frustrations and limitations of the local market do not seem to be putting a complete damper on trader's energies, however. Mr. Qasem's firm is hoping to contract with the Amman Financial Market (AFM) to automate the exchange, where business is currently being conducted mainly by pencil, paper and chalkboard.

"We have offered the idea to them, and there is no solid agreement yet," said Mr. Qasem. "If it were done, it would be within the next year or two."

And despite the concerns of piracy, at least one company has taken the plunge into software developing nonetheless.

"Since everyone else has their doubts about getting into it, we decided to get a head start on them," said Ahmad Tantash, general manager of Tantash Information Systems Group, which is mainly designing Arabic-language software packages for large business offices. In lieu of solid government protection against illicit copying of company programmes, he said, his technicians simply try to pack any software they develop with the toughest anti-piracy programming they can come up with.

Meanwhile, Mr. Zeine linked the third annual computer expo at the Philadelphia, organised by the U.S. embassy to let local dealers of American computer products display their merchandise, with what he believed was the current determination of U.S. computer firms to make inroads against stiff competition from Taiwan in Middle East markets.

The Taiwanese, several dealers said, have long held a significant share of the regional market by offering computer products significantly cheaper than those from other industrial countries.

"The Americans realised that Taiwan was becoming a major threat," Mr. Zeine said, "and as a result they have begun to price accordingly. Now, most American computer products have become only 10 per cent more expensive than their Taiwanese counterparts."

The expo, which closed Friday evening, was held under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah Ben Al Hussein.

Interfaith pilgrims arrive in S. Shuneh; walk for peace and life to Salt, Amman

By Cathy King
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Members of an interfaith pilgrimage for peace and life Friday arrived here, having walked from South Shuneh to Salt (Thursday), and from Salt to Amman yesterday

The majority of the group crossed the King Hussein Bridge on Wednesday afternoon. Thirteen of them were sent to the northern Jordan-Israel border-crossing to obtain entry visas, but finally were reunited with the rest of the group and spent the night at a private farm in South Shuneh.

A few of the pilgrims opted to sleep outside, where possible, and within minutes of arrival at the farm they had found suitable ground to lay their sleeping bags.

"If you're looking for me," said one member to another, "I'll be resting and meditating under that tree."

The pilgrimage, which is in commemoration of the anniversary of the end of World War II, was initiated and organised by the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist religious order in Japan.

Although the pilgrims adhere to different religions, even those that are not Buddhist recite a Buddhist mantra, "Na-Mu-Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo," and practise meditation, a practice central to Buddhism.

When asked the meaning of the mantra, one member said: "I have been told that the more you say it, the clearer the meaning becomes. But some say it means 'there is one truth' or 'may all beings be enlightened'."

The Nipponzan Myohoji order of monks is headed by Brother G. Sasamori, who is also the leader of this leg of the four-leg pilgrimage.

This section began on Oct. 10 in Poland and will culminate in Japan with the final stretch between Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The other three legs of the pilgrimage will have covered the U.S., India and Japan. The Indian and Japanese parts will converge in Japan with the group that is currently here.

In South Shuneh, on the first night, four of the pilgrims were invited to spend the night with a Bedouin family.

"We were two men and women and the family provided us with everything including bedding. They were very hospitable, offering us food and drink all night," said Chilean journalism student Maea Garcia.

"There were 12 sisters, seven brothers, a father and two mothers. Some of the older girls had learnt English at school, and they told us that they had come from Palestine 13 years ago. Even the oldest children were too young to remember it, so they kept asking us about the West Bank and what it is like there," Mr. Garcia told the Jordan times.

Many of the pilgrims remarked on the "stunning beauty" of the scenery they witnessed between the Jordan Valley and Salt.

"I never expected to see scenes like that here. It was awe-inspiring," one group member said.

As yet, the group have had little contact with people beyond that of the police that "escorted us while we walked," said American Dan Turner who is accompanied by his wife.

"The police and authorities have been very concerned for us and very positive (about what we are doing). They also carried a few people who were sick and brought them to Salt," Mr. Turner said.

In Salt the group were put up in the Latin School, where they were able to wash, cook and sleep.

Mr. Turner heard about the pilgrimage through a social justice magazine of which he had been the editor for four years.

"One day a lady called to enquire about an article we had published, and during the conversation she told me about the pilgrimage. Once my wife and I received more information about it we sold everything, our house, our furniture, even our books and prepared to join the walk," he said.

While in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel, Mr. Turner said that the interfaith group met with Palestinian and Israeli peace organisations.

"In each country we have tried to meet with people from all sides of a conflict. In former Yugoslavia we had meetings with Croatian Catholics, Bosnian Muslims and Serbian Orthodox. Our purpose is to remain neutral and to express our compassion and deep concern for all those who suffer in conflict," Mr. Turner said, adding that if a stance is adopted, "you make an enemy of a whole group of people."

If this was the case, then the objective of the peace walk would have been defeated, he said.

In the occupied territories and Israel, he said, the pilgrimage had met with positivism. In Gaza "we were treated like royalty, fed and entertained. There was singing and dancing in the evenings, and when we walked in the streets, people, particularly children, crowded around us and walked with us," Mr. Turner told the Jordan Times.

He said that the desire for peace in Gaza was "as strong as in Israel," while some Palestinians and Israelis expressed anger towards the other.

"But both sides express disillusionment with the Oslo agreement, and this is a bridge of commonality," which could be built on, he added.

The pilgrimage is made up of 15 different nationalities and various cultural, religious and social backgrounds.

Throughout their journey the pilgrims are in close proximity, often physically tired with difficult hygiene conditions to handle, Mr. Turner said.

Here they have been fortunate with their accommodation which included one night at the New English School. Accommodation for their final night (Saturday) has yet to be confirmed.

"Yes, there are disagreements and arguments, but we work them through. Diversity and disagreements do not have to mean antagonism and separation," he said, adding: "if we can live together (in sometimes) difficult circumstances), we hope this is some sort of symbol that it is possible."

Laurel, another pilgrim, fractured her ankle on the third day and only recently rejoined the 14,000-kilometre journey, of which about 4,500 kilometres will be covered on foot.

"We cannot advise and we cannot judge... but we try to empathise without taking sides," Mr. Laurel said.

Today the pilgrims will make preparations for their departure on Sunday. About 35 of them intend to go to Iraq, while the others will fly ahead to India where they will team up with the group already walking there.

WHAT'S GOING ON

PLAY

- ☆ **Play (in Arabic) entitled "You Are Not Yourself" at the Royal Cultural Centre on Thursday at 9:00 p.m.**

EXHIBITIONS

- ☆ **Display of Bani Hamida new designs of rugs at the Bani Hamida House, Jabal Amman (Tel. 658696).**
- ☆ **Exhibition of oil paintings by Sabah Ibrahim at Al Bayraq Art Gallery, Sports City intersection (Tel. 688701).**
- ☆ **Exhibition of handicrafts by Hasmig Kuymjian at the Royal Cultural Centre.**
- ☆ **Photo exhibition at the Friends of Archaeology Centre.**
- ☆ **"Young America" exhibit (with photographs featuring Americans of all ages) at the American Centre.**
- ☆ **Exhibition of works by Qasim Al Samir at the Housing Bank Complex Gallery.**
- ☆ **Book exhibition at the Royal Cultural Centre.**

Clinton backs united Canada

OTTAWA (AP) — Delicately confronting a dispute that has bitterly divided Canadians, U.S. President Bill Clinton offered clear support Thursday for a united Canada, angering separatist leaders battling for an independent Quebec.

In a closely watched speech to parliament, Mr. Clinton tempered his remarks by saying it's up to Canada to decide its own political future, but he made no secret of America's longstanding preference for a unified country.

"In a world darkened by ethnic conflicts that literally tear nations apart," Mr. Clinton said, "Canada has stood for all of us as a model of how people of different cultures can live and work together in peace, prosperity and respect." He pointedly noted President Harry Truman's praise for "Canada's notable achievement of national unity."

Prime Minister Jean Chretien and members of the Liberal Party loudly cheered Mr. Clinton's remarks.

Opposition leader Lucien Bouchard, the most popular separatist figure in Quebec, remained seated, looking grim. Moments later, though, Mr. Bouchard stood and cheered when Mr. Clinton went on to declare that "your political future is entirely for you to decide."

However, Mr. Bouchard was clearly unhappy with the thrust of Mr. Clinton's remarks.

"There is nothing in the diplomatic code that obliges me to stand up and applaud something I do not like to hear," Mr. Bouchard told reporters later.

An independence referendum has been promised this year for Quebec, a French-speaking province of 7 million people.

The prime minister said he was "absolutely" satisfied with the way Mr. Clinton handled the Quebec question. "I think they got the message," Mr. Clinton told reporters.

Bouchard met with Mr. Clinton privately and argued his case for an independent Quebec, promising it would not change relations with Washington. "Americans will just have one more friend," he said. He expressed satisfaction that, for the first time, he had an opportunity to present his side to an American president.

White House Press Secretary Mike McCurry said Mr. Clinton "reacted politely and he thanked Mr. Bouchard for the opportunity to learn more about the separatist movement."

In his speech to parliament, Mr. Clinton won warm applause from all sides by promising to resist Republican-led efforts at home to cut back on international peacekeeping duties and other U.S. foreign commitments.

Ottawa was blanketed with snow but skies were sunny and the weather was almost spring-like as Mr. Clinton arrived for an overnight stay, his first state visit to Canada. Skaters raced along the frozen Rideau Canal as his motorcade rode by, and some cross-country skiers waved to the president in the countryside on his ride in from the airport.

Mr. Clinton's trip was a celebration of extraordinarily warm relations between the United States and Canada, whose $250 billion trade relationship is the largest in the world.

"There probably has not been a time in our relations with Canada in the last decade or more in which there were less problems in our bilateral relationships," Anthony Lake, Mr. Clinton's national security adviser, said.

Following a tradition of visiting foreign leaders, Mr. Clinton helped plant a sugar maple tree in the front yard of Rideau Hall, the official residence of Canadian Governor General Romeo Leblanc. Six other Americans have planted trees on the 88-acre grounds; John F. Kennedy seriously aggravated an old back injury in 1961 when he threw a dozen shovelfuls of dirt to plant two red oaks.

Canadian newspapers stressed Mr. Clinton's sagging popularity and political setbacks. In contrast, Mr. Chretien is enormously popular after 16 months in office, presiding over an economy with strong growth, low inflation and declining unemployment, although troubled by a weakening currency.

In his speech, Mr. Clinton zeroed in on a foreign policy provisions of the Republicans' "Contract With America." A house-passed bill would sharply restrict the president's authority to put U.S. forces under United Nations command. The issue has divided Republicans and faces a test in the Senate.

"There are those in both our nations who say we can no longer afford to and perhaps we no longer even need to exercise our leadership in the world," Mr. Clinton said. "And when so many of our people have their own problems, it is easy to listen to that assertion. But it is wrong."

His statement drew hearty applause. For all practical purposes, Canada invented the notion of peacekeeping and strongly supports such missions.

In a luncheon toast, Mr. Clinton celebrated the two nations' friendship by recalling the words of Mr. Kennedy when he visited in 1961: "Geography has made us neighbours; history has made us friends; economics has made us partners, and necessity has made us allies."

Mr. Clinton added, "President Kennedy proclaimed our wedding vows. I'm here to tell you we should affirm them."

Meanwhile, in his well-orchestrated return to political life, Mr. Bouchard seems to be having second thoughts about going ahead this year with a referendum on independence in the French-speaking province of seven million.

The latest polls show only 40 per cent of Quebec voters support independence, and Mr. Bouchard believes a referendum would be a mistake if separatists can't win.

Quebec Premier Jacques Parizeau, however, is steadfast that the referendum will go ahead in 1995, as promised.

Mr. Parizeau's separatist Parti Quebecois won last fall's provincial election on a platform of transforming Quebec into an independent, French-speaking nation.

A year before, Mr. Bouchard's Bloc Quebecois, which is effectively the national arm of the Parti Quebecois, became the official opposition in the House of Commons.

Honour guards salute as Russian President Boris Yeltsin (centre) and Premier Victor Chernomyrdin (right) stand silent at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier just outside the Moscow Kremlin during a wreath-laying ceremony marking the Day of the Defender of the Fatherland, or Army Day. Mr. Yeltsin later told reporters he was ready to take personal control of reforming the army after its poor performance in the Chechen war (AFP photo)

Yeltsin: Russian army is getting 'wobbly'

MOSCOW (AP) — President Boris Yeltsin marked a major military holiday by admitting that the Russian army is getting "wobbly" and needs reform, but he denied widespread reports of soldiers' atrocities in Chechenya.

His defensive comments on a day the Kremlin once used to boast about Soviet might reflect the nation's subdued, pessimistic mood after 2½ months of a war that has killed tens of thousands in southern Russia.

A "die-in" called by several groups to protest the war on former Red Army Day — now Defenders of the Fatherland Day — drew only a few dozen demonstrators in downtown Moscow. Numerous other rallies also have failed to draw large crowds.

"People are tired," said Angelika Chaichina, 60, one of those picketing in front of the Defence Ministry. "They don't trust the government or anyone else, but they don't understand that it's their own fault" for having elected Mr. Yeltsin and parliament.

"For 70 years we were powerless to change anything, and we got used to that," she said.

Mr. Yeltsin, after laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, promised to pursue long-overdue changes in the Russian army, whose poor funding and training and general idsarray have been shown graphically in Chechenya.

"Chechenya has convinced us once again that we are too late with conducting military reform," he told reporters. "We must not delay any more, the army is beginning to get a bit wobbly. We must do everything to give it confidence."

In a vague reference to the public's strong wish that the war be ended, he said Russian soldiers "need not worry" — the "people" want them to come home soon. He also defended the conduct of the Russian military, severely criticised for the deaths of thousands of Chechen civilians and alleged mistreatment of others.

"No matter what is written about the army, our soldiers never fire at the backs of old people, never use them as a shield, never hide in their houses in order to turn them into gun posts," he said, as quoted by the ITAR-TASS news agency. "Our soldiers fight honourably, and this is the main thing."

Visiting the war-torn north Caucasus, Mr. Yeltsin's former prime minister Yegor Gaidar, said the war is not only dangerous for the army but unwinnable because of its partisan nature.

"The type of conflict in Chechenya is terrible for any modern army because it is not equipped to fight a war against its own people," Mr. Gaidar told the Associated Press in Nazran, Ingushetia.

Also, he said, "there is no possibility of winning except by exterminating all the people."

Rolling Stone termed 'anarchic' in S. Africa

JOHANNESBURG (R) — A Catholic pressure group has called for protests against performances by the Rolling Stones in South Africa which it says will contribute to the "moral and psychological chaos afflicting our country." "In rejecting authority, morals and religion, the Rolling Stones are a most forceful expressison of... anarchy," the Young South Africans for a Christian Civilisation said in a statement sent to Reuters Friday. Concert promoters said Johannesburg's 63,000-capacity Ellis Park Rugby Stadium had been virtually sold out for both the Friday Saturday performances by the veterans rock and roll group.

British boy runs away — to Malaysia

LONDON (R) — A 14-year-old boy who "loves travelling" ran away from home and ended up in Malaysia, his parents said Friday. Peter Kerry of London pilfered his father's credit card to pay for the 8,000-mile (13,000-kilometre) journey, they said. But he is now broke and stranded and telephoned home asking for help. "We don't think there is any particular reason why he has chosen Malaysia — he just likes travelling," his mother, Pat Kerry, said. "He loves going on planes and trains and I think he may have chosen this country just because it is so far away." She said she had told her son to contact the British High Commission (embassy) in Kuala Lumpur for help.

Missing British actor 'is alive and well'

LONDON (R) — British actor Stephen Fry, who mysteriously pulled out of a West End play and disappeared last week, is alive and well, his agent said Friday. Mr. Fry, 37, best known for his portrayal as the butler in the television series "Jeeves And Wooster" based on the PG Wodehouse novels, had been starring in Simon Gray's play Cell Mates when he left just three days after the opening performance. He wrote to colleagues before his disappearance Saturday, bemoaning his "failure" as an actor. Reviews of the play had criticised Fry's performance. Concern for his safety grew as days passed with no word from the comedian. But a spokeswoman for his agent Lorraine Hamilton said he had telephoned to say he was all right. "He has gone away for a while to be by himself," she said, adding that he would not say where he was.

Filmmaker Chen Kaige marries television star

BEIJING (AFP) — Filmmaker Chen Kaige, winner of the Golden Palm Award at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival for Farewell My Concubine, has wed Ni Ping, a star of Chinese television, the Nanjing Evening News Reported. The couple married at the end of last year and took a short honeymoon at West Lake in Hanghzou, called a "paradise on earth" by the Chinese, the newspaper said. It was the second marriage for both. Ni Ping is one of China's most popular television personalities and is a regular presenter of the show marking the Lunar New Year. Chen, who along with Zhang Yimou is the best known of the Chinese filmmakers called the Fifth Generation, is shooting his next film, which is focused on Shanghai in the 1930s.

Officials punished for watching strip show

BEIJING (AFP) — Six Chinese officials have been punished after it was discovered that they had slipped out of an official tour in the United States to watch a strip show. A notice issued Monday by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Communist Party of China said one of the offenders had been fired while the others had received "various punishments," the Xinhua News Agency reported. The six from Tianjin had been visiting Los Angeles in July of last year when they went to see the show in Hollywood, it said. "Party officials who break the rules of discipline of the party and state, or who act in a manner harming the state and human dignity must be seriously dealt with," the statement warned.

Bonn outlaws 2 neo-Nazi groups

BONN (R) — Germany Friday banned the far-right Free German Workers' Party (FAP), one of the largest and most radical neo-Nazi groups and one that has been linked to racist and anti-semitic attacks.

In Hamburg, local authorities also outlawed the the right-wing National List, a small group headed by Christian Worch, one of Germany's most influential neo-Nazis and a driving force behind efforts to create a national neo-Nazi network.

The Constitutional Court ruled the FAP was not a true political party, clearing the way for the government to outlaw the group and confiscate its wealth and property, the Interior Ministry said in a statement.

Interior Minister Manfred Kanther immediately ordered widespread police raids on the homes of FAP members.

Bonn has banned at least four far-right groups in a crackdown against neo-Nazi violence that surged alarmingly after unification in 1990 and in which at least 30 people, most of them foreigners, have been killed.

"We must fight extremism from the right as well as the left with determination," Mr. Kanther said in the statement.

"The FAP... resembled in its nature the Nazi party, revered Nazi leaders and fostered Nazi rites," he added. "It scorned human rights, defamed democratic institutions and spread racist and anti-Semitic tirades."

A spokesman for the city state of Hamburg said the National List was outlawed there on the same basis as the FAP after the Constitutional Court ruled it was not a political party.

Mr. Worch, 38, was jailed for two years in November for neo-Nazi activities.

Among other things, he has been credited with organising a demonstration by 500 neo-Nazis who dodged police crodons to parade Nazi-style through the city of Fulda in 1993.

A recent government report said FAP leaders spoke in Nazi terms of seizing power, jailing their enemies in work camps or executing them.

They had cultivated ties with far-right groups Russia, particularly the banned fascist Russian National Unity (RNU).

The FAP has been the largest of the radical neo-Nazi groups causing unease in Germany through its increasingly visible rallies of public flaunting of its anti-foreigner policies.

The group itself claims to have several thousand supporters, but the government put its membership at about 400 in 1993.

Several FAP officials have been implicated in crimes.

Earlier this month, police swooped down on 66 homes and offices of FAP members in nine federal states after a rally in which the rightists waved banners bearing Swastikas and gave the stiff-arm Hitler salute.

More than 50 FAP officials are being probed as a result for breaking the law banning Nazi symbols. The suspects include FAP national chief Friedhelm Busse, 73, widely regarded as a leading figure in the German neo-Nazi scene.

"Following the Constitutional Court decision that the FAP is not a political party, a ban became the only reasonable measure," Mr. Kanther said.

Christopher treated for ulcer

OTTAWA (R) — U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher was resting comfortably at an Ottawa hospital Friday where he was being treated for a small bleeding stomach ulcer that cut short his participation in a U.S.-Canada summit.

Deputy State Department spokesman David Johnson said "if things go as we expect they will" Mr. Christopher would be released Friday but that he might have to be admitted to a hospital in Washington for further treatment upon his return to the U.S. capital.

Mr. Christopher, 69, complained of feeling ill after a late afternoon meeting Thursday with Canadian External Affairs Minister Andre Ouellet and after consulting his Los Angdes physician by phone was taken to the emergency department of Civic Hospital

A hospital gastroenterologist, Paul Deneault, said he found a "very, very small ulcer oozing a little bit of blood," into Mr. Christopher's bowl. An injection of medicine promptly stopped the bleeding, he said.

"He's fit as a fiddle he's a very healthy man, and at the present time he's doing quite well and we're just observing him," said the hospital's vice president of medical affairs, Chris Carruthers.

Author Emmanuel Robles dies at 80

PARIS (AP) — Emmanuel Robles, author of nearly 40 works exploring the human condition and friend of Albert Camus, has died, his publisher announced Thursday. He was 80.

Mr. Robles died Wednesday in Boulogone, according to the Seuil Publishing House. The cause of death was not immediately known.

Mr. Robles was perhaps best known for Montserrat, a play about the Venezulean resistance to the Spanish invasion. The work was translated into more than 20 languages and sold in more than 40 countries.

A prolific writer of novels, plays, poetry, essays, and short stories, Robles was fascinated with the brotherhood of Mediterranean cultures and the conflict between violence and humanity — themes he explored in many of his works.

Born in Oran, in western Algeria, Mr. Robles travelled extensively, at ease in Latin and Mediterranean cultures.

In Algeria, he met Camus. The two cultivated a firm friendship. They worked together at the newspaper Alger Republicain in the 1940s.

Mr. Robles first made his literary mark with Les Hauteurs De La Ville (City Heights), which won France's prestigious Femina Prize in 1948. The novel was inspired by a Muslim revolt in Setif, Algeria, against French occupiers.

In 1952, movie director Luis Bunuel adapted a Robles novel in his film Cela S'Appealle L'Aurore (It is Called Dawn).

The novels, Les Couteaux (The Knives) and La Remontee Du Fleuve (The River Rising), are among other noted works.

Later in his career, Mr. Robles dwelled on contemporary tragedies such as Hiroshima and the Chinese Civil War. He was deeply troubled about the human struggle for dignity and the pain "which makes men cry across the ages."

In April, Seul will publish Jeunes Saisons (Young Seasons) and Camus, Frere De Soleil (Camus, Brother Of The Sun) which celebrates Robles' friendship with the author.

All Creatures author James Herriot dies

LONDON (AFP) — James Herriot, Britain's most famous vet and one of its best-known contemporary authors, died of prostate cancer, aged 78, at his home near Thirsk in northern England.

He had been ill for three years but had asked that the nature of his illness not be disclosed while he was alive.

The author began writing about his experiences as a country vet in the Yorkshire Dales of northern England more than 40 years ago. His 19 books have since sold some 60 million copies and have been translated into every major language.

Mr. Herriot became a household name following the immensely popular television series All Creatures Great And Small and films based on his books.

The series, with repeats and overseas sales, has been shown almost continuously somewhere in the world since 1978. At the same time, an area of one of the most beautiful parts of England was put on the tourist map, and a "Herriot country" industry was born.

Herriot, whose real name was James Alfred Wight — known to friends as Alf — worked as a vet for a quarter of a century without writing a word.

Acquitted Pakistani Christians are in danger as Muslims plan demonstration

LAHORE, Pakistan (AFP) — Two Pakistani Roman Catholics saved from the gallows after being acquitted of blasphemy charges remain in mortal danger, their lawyer said here Friday as indignant Muslims denounced the ruling.

Salamat Masih, 14, and his uncle Rehmat Masih, 44, were still being held in a local jail pending legal formalities following their acquittal by the Lahore High Court Thursday in a ruling hailed by Christians and civil libertarians.

"We know their lives are in danger," defence counsel Hina Jilani said, adding that "we are still discussing where to keep them" after their release.

"Of course one thing is sure: They will not be sent to their village," stressed Jilani, who said her team was trying hard to get the two out of the jail Friday, despite a religious holiday in this predominantly Muslim nation.

The Masihs were sentenced to death by a lower court earlier this month for allegedly scrawling blasphemous remarks on the wall of a mosque and throwing scraps of paper bearing sacrilegious words into the compound in their village at Gujranwala district near here.

But the Lahore High Court ruled there was no evidence to substantiate the accusations, triggering an outcry from Muslims who wanted the two executed for allegedly blaspheming the Prophet Mohammad.

A third defendant, Manzoor Masih, was slain by gunmen last year. He was not related to the two who were acquitted.

Observers said the two could be flown abroad quietly or else go into hiding like authors Salman Rushdie of Britain and Taslima Nasreen of Bangladesh. Muslim clerics had issued "fatwahs" or religious edicts urging followers of Islam to kill both writers for blasphemy.

Rasheed Murtaza Qureshi (hands raised), prosecuting lawyer in the case of Christians Salamat Masih and Rehmat Masih, announces his boycott of the high court appeal proceedings. Mr. Qureshi charges that the high court is not impartial in the case. Salamat and Rehmat were sentenced to death by a lower court for blasphemy. The main complainanat Maulvi Fazal Haq is at front (AFP photo)

Simpson prosecutor cited for contempt of court

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The judge in the O.J. Simpson case cited a prosecutor for contempt of court for repeatedly interrupting during a heated discussion at the bench. But the prosecutor escaped punishment by apologising.

"It appears that the court is correct, that perhaps my comments may have been or are somewhat inappropriate," Prosecutor Christopher Darden told Judge Lance Ito. "I apologise to the court. I meant no disrespect."

Judge Ito offered an apology of his own, assured Mr. Darden that the prosecutor's behaviour was "out of character," and let the trial resume with detective Tom Lange, one of the chief investigators in the murder case, back on the stand.

The confrontation was prompted by a heated exchange at the judge's bench that could not be heard. Judge Ito ordered the jury out of the room and announced that he had cited Mr. Darden for contempt.

Prosecutor Marcia Clark rose to Mr. Darden's defence, complaining that Mr. Darden was frustrated because Simpson attorney Johnnie Cochran Jr., who was cross-examining officer Lange at the time, has been "feeding the jury slop." Prosecutors have accused the defence of repeatedly trying to sneak in facts by asking loaded questions.

"Miss Clark, I don't want to hear about that," the judge said.

Judge Ito recessed court briefly to give prosecutors time to weigh their options. Upon his return, Mr. Darden apologised.

"However," he said, "I did have some concerns, concerns I would like to take up to with the court when the court is available to hear my concerns."

The subject that sparked the dispute involved Mr. Cochran's efforts to question Officer Lange about a police interview with Simpson's younger daughter Sydney after her mother was murdered, and about whether Faye Resnick had moved in with Ms. Simpson 10 days earlier. The defence objected that the line of questioning involved hearsay and assumed facts that had not been brought into evidence.

That led to the sidebar conference. It wasn't immediately known exactly what Mr. Darden said to anger the judge during that discussion.

But Judge Ito cited Mr. Darden for his "refusal to obey the court's order not to address (an) issue, not to speak to the court as I was hearing from one counsel, not to interrupt the court."

"The court gave three admonitions, and Mr. Darden chose to ignore those," Judge Ito said.

Earlier in the day, Simpson's lawyers won the right to show the jury TV footage they contend shows investigators swarming carelessly over the crime scene. Ms. Clark had complained that the camera lens gave too distorted a picture.

The judge said he will allow the defence to use three excerpts, but he agreed to warn the jury about the possibility of distortion caused by the lens, and he said he needed to see more of a fourth clip before making a decision.

Mr. Cochran argued that the tape is the best record of what happened that day and will show that investigators contaminated or trampled evidence in the tight walkway at Nicole Brown Simpson's condo, where she and Ronald Goldman were found slashed to death on June 12.

"This all would have been handled appropriately if the LAPD would videotape these crime scenes like other big-city departments do. They'd have their own video," Mr. Cochran said.

But Ms. Clark said the footage — apparently taken by telephoto lens from across the street — is misleading because it doesn't accurately show the spatial relationships and doesn't show people's feet. In one scene, she said, the camera makes it look as if investigators were practically on top of one another.

"The very reason the defence wants it is because it is so misleading, it is so inaccurate, it is such a distortion of the truth," Ms. Clark said.

The day's session was delayed for hours by a private meeting between the judge and attorneys.

In another development, Judge Ito shortened the trial's hours, a move he said earlier would give attorneys more time for preparation.

Beginning Monday, the trial will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 9 a.m. to noon on Fridays. Normally, court has run until about 4:30 p.m.

Also Thursday, District Attorney Gil Garcetti said he was happy with the presentation of the prosecution's evidence so far. But he vowed to retry Simpson if the jury deadlocks.

"I know it's expensive. I don't take that lightly. The taxpayers, my family, my friends, everyone has to pay," he said. "But we're here to seek justice. You have to remember the victims in this case, and in every other case that we handle."

A window collapses under the weight of soft drink bottles and other foodstuffs stacked in a coach coming from Hrasnica, a Sarajevo suburb. Residents are bringing in cheaper food from Hrasnica to Sarajevo by using the reopened U.N.-controlled Blue Routes through the no man's land and the airport area (AFP photo)

Akashi meets Milosevic, pushes campaign for Balkan peace

SARAJEVO (R) — U.N. special envoy Yasushi Akashi met Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic Friday after a week of secretive efforts to persuade a key player in the Balkans conflict to help avert fresh fighting.

Mr. Akashi's visit to Belgrade followed talks Thursday between Mr. Milosevic and representatives of the contact group of big powers.

Peace brokers have offered to ease sanctions on Serbian-dominated rump Yugoslavia if Belgrade recognises Croatia and Bosnia, where it has backed separatist Serbs since the break up of the old Yugoslav Federation in 1991-92.

Mr. Milosevic told Russian envoy Andrei Kozyrev at the weekend that the sanctions must be lifted first.

Few details emerged either from Mr. Akashi's talks or from those the previous day with envoys from Britain, France and Germany.

The independent BETA news agency said the European envoys left with "mixed feelings." It quoted sources as saying it was "quite certain" that a complete lifting of sanctions was not offered to Mr. Milosovic.

The contact group — the United States, Russia, France, Germany and Britain — fears a new war could break out in Croatia and Bosnia, drawing in Serbian-led rump Yugoslavia.

Two worrisome deadlines are approaching. A ceasefire has since Jan. 1 subdued fighting in Bosnia between the Muslim-led government and the rebel Serbs but it is due to expire on April 30.

In Croatia, the Zagreb government has ordered U.N. peacekeepers to leave when their mandate expires on March 31, saying their presence has allowed Croatian Serbs to consolidate their breakaway Krajina region.

"The urgency to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough is clearer than ever," said a French Foreign Ministry spokesman.

Yugoslav Foreign Minister Vladislav Jovanovic said the question of recognition of Bosnia and Croatia was possible "only after all outstanding issues concerning the position of Serbs in these two former Yugoslav republics are resolved."

Mr. Jovanovic, in an interview published by the Yugoslav News Agency, Tanjug, also warned Zagreb that Belgrade was against a new Serb-Croat war but would not discount the possibility of stepping in to help fellow Serbs if they were attacked.

On the ground, the U.N. reported an increase in firing incidents overnight on several battlefronts across north-central Bosnia, extending from Doboj to the eastern enclave of Srebrenica.

Clashes also continued in the northwestern Bihac enclave, where Muslim rebels backed by Bosnian and Croatian Serbs are fighting the government army.

U.N. officials say the incidents are at a much lower level now compared to last year before the ceasefire.

But the Bihac fighting and occasional clashes elsewhere take place against a stalemate in ceasefire negotiations and preparations for more war, such as trench digging and training.

In Sarajevo, U.N. officials expressed concern that Bosnian Serbs may be reconsidering the agreement which has allowed the opening of two roads across the airport to civilian traffic — one of the few provisions of the ceasefire accord which the warring sides have carried out.

The Bosnian Serbs, who have laid siege to Sarajevo since the war began in April 1992, were arguing civilians were using the roads to carry back large quantities of goods from the government-held suburb of Hrasnica.

"The airport routes remained open but the current arrangements are coming under scrutiny by the BSA. They are concerned by the increasing amount of commercial goods that are being carried in the buses and cars," U.N. spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Gary Coward said.

S. Korea warns North to keep Poles at border

SEOUL (R) — South Korea Friday warned the Communist North its plan to oust a Polish contingent from a multinational body policing Korea's cold war border could have dire diplomatic consequences.

Assistant Foreign Minister Lee Jae-Chun told reporters North Korea's threat to dismiss a Polish mission from the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) could push Pyongyang further into international isolation.

"At a time when there is no new peace treaty, the United States have thoughts of taking stern measures against North Korea. We will also take stern measures against North Korea after close consultations with other NNSC nations," Mr. Lee said.

He was speaking after talks with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord, in Seoul for discussions on easing relations with Stalinist Pyongyang and implementation of the landmark U.S.-North Korean nuclear pact struck last October.

North Korea notified the six-man Polish delegation two weeks ago that food, water and electricity to their camp, just north of the inter-Korean border near the truce village of Panmunjom, would be cut off at the end of February.

A Swedish NNSC delegation member told Reuters the Poles had been confined to their camp for two weeks and were expecting to be thrown out next Tuesday.

"We have not seen them since Feb. 9, which is the last time they were allowed to patrol inside the joint security area at Panmunjom. It is almost as if they are being held prisoner at their camp," he said.

He said the Poles were in regular walkie-talkie contact with the Swedish/Swiss NNSC camp south of the border and say they are fit and well.

"They say they can stay until next Tuesday, after that we don't know what will happen," the Swedish official said.

Warsaw's Foreign Ministry said Thursday Poland would not withdraw from the NNSC even if they had to quit the camp.

"Evacuation is one possible scenario. It does not mean Poland withdrawing from the Supervisory Commission but we cannot risk any threat to our personnel," ministry official Jerzy Pomianowski said.

North Korea's move against the Poles is its latest effort to dismantle the intricate armistice process that has kept an uneasy truce in Korea for more than 40 years.

In 1933, it refused to allow a delegation from the Czech Republic to take over border duties from Czechoslovakia. Since then the Swedes, the Swiss and the Poles have maintained the NNSC presence.

Under the armistice, North Korea itself had selected then-Communist Poland and Czechoslovakia for NNSC duties. The U.S. led United Nations side close Switzerland and Sweden.

Last yer, Pyongyang withdrew from the Military Armistice Commission, the main body overseeing the truce, and persuaded wartime ally China to do likewise.

North Korea, describing the armistice as a "useless piece of paper," proposed talks with the United States to replace the pact with a full-scale peace treaty.

The South says any peace treaty should be discussed between the two Koreas alone, as agreed in a 1991 non-aggression pact.

The Seoul Foreign Ministry said it supported a joint statement issued by the three remaining NNSC countries on Thursday demanding the removal of threats by North Korea.

"We urge the North Korean side to observe the present armistice and sincerely implement its duty as a member of the international community by immediately withdrawing threats unilaterally applied on the Polish delegation," it said.

Irish president urges listening to Unionists

TOKYO (R) — Irish President Mary Robinson urged the British and Irish governments Friday to pay attention to fears voiced by Northern Ireland's Protestant Unionists over a peace plan for the province.

"It is true that there has been criticism and sharp reaction to the framework document," the Irish president said.

"What is important now is that there be ability to listen to the fears, take seriously the sense of apprehension of the Unionists fear that they may lose their identity," she told a Tokyo news conference.

On Wednesday, Britain and Ireland announced an initiative to forge new relations between Protestant-dominated Northern Ireland and the Roman Catholic Irish Republic from which it was partitioned 70 years ago.

the Anglo-Irish document outlined proposals for a Northern Ireland Assembly and plans to forge new relationships between Dublin and the North.

Northern Ireland's Protestant Unionists have already voiced their disapproval of the three-part framework document. They fear Dublin's involvement will hasten the end of their British status and lead to the reunification of Ireland.

Protestant politicians, angered by what they see as a sell-out by the British government, Thursday began two days of talks on how to react to the plan for the province.

"The important thing now is the question of political discussion and not political violence," Mrs. Robinson said.

"This is a time of singular hope and opportunity for the people of the island of Ireland with the achievement of peace," she added.

Gerry Adams, president of the Sinn Fein, political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), said Friday he was convinced the "British disengagement" from Northern Ireland was in its final phase, and that he would see a united Ireland in his lifetime.

In an interview here with the AFP on the eve of Sinn Fein's annual conference in Dublin, Mr. Adams, 46, said the Republican nationalist movement he heads was today no longer at war with Britain.

"The British," he said, "are still the enemy. But we're engaging now with the enemy in order to make friends with them, which is a different project entirely."

Mr. Adams said he did not foresee a need for Sinn Fein to resell the peace process to the IRA.

"When I went to them before Aug. 31 (when the ceasefire was declared) it was because the IRA was seeking an assessment, it took that historic decision," he said.

"There has been no reason to go back... The IRA can read the situation as well as you or I."

Mr. Adams would not be drawn on whether IRA weapons would ever be surrendered, even without a resumption of violence.

Taiwan chief of staff: China threat grows

TAIPEI (R) — Taiwan's military chief said Friday rival China was building up its forces while talking peace, posing a growing threat to Taiwan and to disputed territories in the South China Sea.

Chief of General Staff Liun Ho-Chien said in a speech China had moved missiles bases to a province near Taiwan early this year at a time when Chinese President Jiang Zemin was making conciliatory remarks toward Taipei.

"During the release of Jiang's 'eight points,' the Chinese Communists moved two missile contingents and M-class missile bases from Jiangxi province to Fujian province, making the entire Taiwan area within the target range of Chinese missiles," Mr. Liu said.

Taiwan, arch-rival of China since 1949, lies 220 kilometres from Fujian province on China's south east coast. Jiangxi is inland and westward from Fujian.

Mr. Liu's claim of the missile-base moves could not be independently confirmed.

"Although this is only the typical double-handed strategy of peace and war at the same time, we cannot relax and must respond with extra vigilance," sGen. Liu told an audience of officials and specialists at a university.

Gen. Liu added that China had performed military exercises near Taiwan during 1994, which "judging by their content and focus, were concentrating on attacking Taiwan."

Taiwan's ruling Nationalist Party lost a civil war on the mainland in 1949. China has not ruled out using force to regain Taiwan, which it regards as a renegade province.

Most military spending in Taiwan goes on defences against China.

OAS chief wields sanctions threat to end Ecuador-Peru border conflict

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Ecuador and Peru could face strong measures if their month-long border war does not end immediately, warned Organisation of American States (OAS) Secretary General, Cesar Gaviria.

"We can't continue to just watch Ecuador and Peru accuse each other and the worsening of the conflict," Mr. Gaviria told a special meeting of the OAS Permanent Council convened late Thursdy at the request of Ecuador.

Mr. Gaviria warned that unless the fighting stopped at once, he would request the council to launch "the instruments and mechanisms of the OAS, including the possibility of a clear and firm arms embargo and the threat of economic sanctions."

Ecuador called the urgent OAS meeting to discuss the violation of the latest ceasefire agreement signed in Brasilia and Feb. 17.

Ecuador's joint chiefs of staff in Quito said Peru had launched a major offensive that had raised the Ecuadorean death toll in the month-long border conflict from 12 to 25 and the number of injured from 53 to 62.

Brazil's Foreign Ministry also formally notified Lima and Quito that a four-nation observer mission to the border scheduled for March 1 was cancelled because of the ongoing fighting.

"There exists a clear violation" of the ceasefire, Brazilian General Ariel Pereyra De Fonseca said in Lima as an advance team of monitors prepared to visit several border points on the Peruvian side of the frontier.

"But I hope that the peace agreement will be firmly consolidated in the upcoming days," he said, adding that the team would visit both sides of the border on March 8.

Under the Feb. 17 ceasefire, Peru and Ecuador agreed to allow international observers to the boder, create a demilitarised zone and negotiate a final settlement in line with a 1942 peace treaty.

The agreement was brokered by Argentina, Brazil, Chile and the United States, guarantors of the 1942 Protocol of Rio de Janeiro which set the border between the two countries but failed to mark a 78-kilometre (48-mile) stretch of jungle along the Andes' Condor range that has been the source of constant friction.

Ecuador said the latest Peruvian offensive was centred on the key Ecuadorean-held outpost of Tiwinza, which both sides have been battling to control since fighting began on Jan. 26.

Mr. Gaviria said that "if in my judgement the situation between Ecuador and Peru continues to deteriorate I would be forced to not only bring the subject before the Council, but to propose specific measures to strengthen the role of the guarantor countries."

The OAS charter allows the organisation to propose sanctions, but leaves the decision to apply them up to the individual member countries.

During the three-hour meeting at OAS headquarters in Washington, Chile's OAS Ambassador Edmundo Vargas Carreno proposed that the foreign ministers of Peru, Ecuador and the four guarantors of the Rio Protocol meet Tuesday in Montevideo.

The proposal was accepted in principle by Peru and Ecuador, but needs to be studied by Argentina, Brazil and the United States, diplomats said.

Burma prepares to attack rebel opium king

BANGKOK (R) — Burmese government forces will soon launch a major offensive against Burma's opium warlord Khun Sa and his guerrilla army, the Thai military said Friday.

Thai regional army commander Colonel Charoen Netrpae told a news conference Thai forces had been monitoring a build up of Burmese troops and said an attack on Khun Sa's strongholds in northeastern Burma's Shan state was imminent.

Khun Sa commands a well-equipped guerrilla force of 8,000 men and controls large areas of the Burmese section of the Golden Triangle opium-growing region.

The Golden Triangle, where Laos, Burma and Thailand meet, is one of the world's main regions for growing opium poppys.

The 60-year-old rebel commander has been indicted by a U.S. court on drug trafficking charges and is regularly condemned by Thai and U.S. narcotics officials as one of the world's leading drug runners.

Burma's military government has vowed to wipe out Khun Sa and his Mong Tai army guerrilla force, saying he is a drug trafficking bandit.

But Khun Sa says he is a Shan nationalist fighting the Burmese government for the independence of Shan state and only taxes opium traders passing through his zone of control.

Burmese forces launched a large-scale attack on Khun Sa in late 1993 and inconclusive fighting continued until the rainy season set in last June.

Meanwhile, another Thai army commander said there was no evidence Burmese government forces used chemical weapons in their successful assault on the Karen guerrilla stronghold of Kawmoora earlier this week.

Karen guerrillas complained that Burmese forces fired shells containing a debilitating gas in their final assault on the rebel base.

But Colonel Dire Yeamngarmrieb, commander of a Thai army Border Task Force, told the news conference that after investigating the allegations he had been unable to find any evidence of a chemical attack.

Col. Direk rejected Burmese government claims that Kawmoora and the Karen's former headquarters at Manerplaw, which fell on Jan. 27, were captured by a Karen rebel splinter faction that broke away from the main guerrilla group in December.

The Thai commander said it was Burmese army units who attached, captured and occupied the two guerrilla bases.

The Burmese junta is still willing to welcome insurgent groups into the legal fold for the sake of peace and development, official newspapers Friday quoted Senior General Than Shwe as saying.

Thirteen ethnic rebel groups had already signed ceasefire agreements with the government, and "as far as the remaining groups are concerned, our position is that as long as they prove sincere, we are always willing and ready to welcome them," he said.

Than Shwe, speaking to graduates of the Institute of National Races Thursday, apparently made no direct reference to the Karen National Union (KNU), whose last border stronghold was overrun by junta troops this week.

Within the next five to 10 years, he predicted, "the gap between the central and border regions will have narrowed down considerably."

The New Light of Myanmar reported Friday that more than 8,210 people had returned to Burma from refugee camps in Thailand since fighting stopped in most of the Karen state.

Rao again under attack from party rebels

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao is under renewed attack from within his Congress (I) Party as it faces a possible wash-out in make-or-break state elections, party sources said.

Dissidents are pressing for an early party forum to discuss ways to arrest the waning influence of the 109-year-old Congress, which political analysts warn faces a bleak future.

Congress sources said a quiet signature campaign was on to make Mr. Rao, who is also the party president, convene a meeting of the All India Congress Committee (AICC), which groups some 1,000 party leaders across the country.

Simultaneously, a group of young MPs who have come to be known as the "Young Turks" want the party to slow down the free-market economic reforms begun by Mr. Rao in July 1991 after becoming prime minister.

"It is becoming very clear that our party's support among the poor and Muslims is falling rapidly," said Aslam Sher Khan, a Muslim MP and one of the "Young Turks."

"The Congress is beginning to lose its traditional identity," he told AFP. "We are naturally concerned. We want to know how we can bring back these groups into the Congress fold with dignity."

Rajesh Pilot, a junior minister and another "Young Turk," shocked the party last week by warning publicly that India would go the Mexico way if it blindly pursued its economic reforms.

Mr. Rao, 73, has been under pressure since the Congress was routed in elections in two southern states in December. He expelled his main rival, Arjun Singh, from the Congress on Feb. 7 in a move aimed at ending the rebellion.

But Arjun Singh, who was the de facto number two in the government until he quit the cabinet in December, has refused to abandon the fight and has pursued a subtle campaign aimed at undermining Mr. Rao's leadership.

And Congress dissidents, after lying low for a while following Arjun Singh's sacking, have resumed their veiled attacks on Mr. Rao.

Congress sources said this was bad news for the prime minister, coming in the middle of staggered polls in six Indian states. Analysts have warned that a Congress rout in the February-March ballot could spell disaster for Mr. Rao.

Mr. Khan, a former Indian hockey star who took to politics after the 1980 Moscow Olympics, is a known supporter of Arjun Singh. Both are from Madhya Pradesh, India's largest state.

"An AICC meeting is very necessary," Mr. Khan said, adding that he had called a meeting of some 1,100 party leaders, including 350 MPs, at his home on March 13 which could well turn into a de facto AICC gathering.

Mr. Khan refused to directly criticise Mr. Rao, but took potshots at the premier.

"We have to identify the forces which are responsible for the weakening of the Congress," he said. "Unfortunately, we don't have leaders of the stature of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi today."

Opinion polls have predicted a defeat for the Congress in the western state of Maharashtra, which went to the polls on Feb. 9 and 12, and adjoining Gujrat, where elections will conclude Saturday.

It also faces a tough fight in the eastern states of Bihar and Orissa, where polling is due next month.

Mr. Khan said Congress would be in serious trouble if it lost the four states.

"We were drubbed in the north in November 1993 and we lost the south in December (last year)," he said. "If we lose in the west and east also, what is the party left with?"

Preliminary hearing in Andreotti case adjourned

PALERMO, Italy (AFP) — A hearing on whether former Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, who dominated Italian politics for 50 years, should be tried on charges of collusion with the Mafia was adjourned Friday to March 2, one of his attorneys said.

Guiseppe Alessi told reporters that investigative Judge Agostino Gristina had heard a defence plea to have the case transferred to a special court in Rome set up to try members or former members of the government.

Four previous hearings on the Andreotti case have been adjourned at the request of the defence attorneys who wanted more time to prepare their case because of new charges being filed against their 76-year-old client.

Judicial sources earlier hinted that Friday's hearing would also be adjourned by Judge Gristina because of new charges filed Thursday against Mr. Andreotti by the Palermo prosecutor's office.

It was unclear what the new charges were.

Mr. Andreotti, a Christian Democratic senator for life and seven times former premier, did not attend Friday's hearing, which was held behind closed doors.

According to the more than 90,000-page complaint against him, he cultivated ties with Mafia boss Toto Riina in the aim of securing Mafia-controlled votes in Sicily during his reign within the Christian Democratic Party.

He is also suspected of ordering the 1979 assassination of journalist Mino Pecorelli, who was about to publish a book that threatened to embrrass him.

The charges against Mr. Andreotti are based on testimony from 15 Mafia turncoats who cooperated with authorities.

Claes clinging on to NATO chair by a thread

BRUSSELS (AFP) — Willy Claes's future as secretary-general of NATO hung in the balance Friday as the fallout from a 1988 bribery scandal left him under intense pressure to resign.

Dutch Foreign Minister Hans Van Mierlo broke the official silence on the issue late Wednesday when he acknowledged that the NATO leader was in a "vulnerable position."

NATO diplomats Thursday ruled out a move to force Mr. Claes to resign following his confession that he had been aware of an attempt by Italian helicopter manufacturer Agusta to bribe his Flemish Socialist (SP) Party to win a $225-million contract from the Belgian army at a time when his position has been considerably weakened.

Their tone has shifted markedly, from breezy confidence that Mr. Claes had done nothing wrong to concern about the implications of a forced resignation on the alliance at a crucial point in its evolution.

"NATO simply cannot afford another period with an empty chair where we should have a secretary-general," one diplomat said. NATO was without a leader for much of 1994 as Mr. Claes' predecessor, Manfred Woerner, battled terminal cancer and the allies squabbled over the choice of successor.

If Mr. Claes stepped down, even temporarily to clear his name, it would be deeply damaging to an alliance which is currently embroiled in the delicate processes of rebuilding a fractured relationship with Russia and forging a new security strategy for the Mediterranean region.

The Belgian press continued to campaign for the country's leading international figure to resign in a scandal they have predictably dubbed "Willygate."

In their view, Mr. Claes' position became untenable Wednesday when he first denied then acknowledged being told of the Agusta approach only weeks after the group won the contract to supply 56 helicopters.

"By lying (badly, which is quite an achievement for a diplomat) Mr. Claes has covered himself in ridicule," La Derniere Heure commented.

"What Claes has said publicly is not 100 per cent compatible with what he told us earlier in the week, but it is not enough to hang him with," a NATO diplomat responded.

Three former SP officials and an Agusta representative have been charged in connection with the affair.

Etienne Mange, the party's former treasurer and head of the Belgian post office, has testified he told Mr. Claes, then-Belgian Foreign Minister Frank Vandenbroucke and Louis Tobback, the interior minister, of the Agusta approach at the time.

The investigating judge in the case wants to talk to them all and the Belgian cabinet was expected Friday to discuss lifting Mr. Vandenbroucke and Mr. Tobback's parliamentary immunity.

As a Belgian citizen, Mr. Claes has no immunity in connection with the affair and could be called to face questioning at any time.

The affair is certain to cast a cloud over a series of high-profile contacts Mr. Claes has scheduled for next week.

On Monday he is due to meet U.S. Vice President Al Gore and Wednesday he flies to Washington for talks with Prersident Bill Clinton and U.S. Defence Secretary William Perry.

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Old forum for new problem

IF THE U.N. Security Council is not the appropriate place to deal with the ever-increasing Israeli settlement plans in the occupied Palestinian territories, as the Arab group at the U.N. headquarters in New York is now demanding, we don't know what is. The Israelis and their supporters are lobbying against convening the council for this purpose on the pretext that the ongoing peace talks between them and the Palestinians are better suited to discuss this crisis than the U.N. itself.

Normally we would agree that the bilateral peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) would offer the right forum for resolving the serious dispute over settlements. But given the fact that these talks are practically at a standstill and have proven to be unproductive in stopping the continued Israeli colonisation of Palestinian lands, the international community and the immediate parties are left with no other option but to air out their differences before the principal international organ dealing with all threats to international peace and security. This does not mean that convening the council would automatically offer an immediate remedy to the dispute. Given the polarisation that still plagues the council on Arab-Israeli disputes, there is little doubt that its permanent members would not see eye-to-eye on the urgent need to do something effective in the direction of halting the perpetual Israeli designs to create new and seemingly irreversible realities in the area.

The Arab group in New York should do some real homework before calling on the Security Council to hold a meeting on this most troubling issue. Unless Washington is successfully won in favour of an international intervention to stop Israeli settlement plans, however, there can be little hope for obtaining a meaningful resolution. Holding a council meeting that does not produce forceful action is worse than not having the meeting altogether.

The U.S. and its permanent allies on the council need to be convinced that whereas old and existing Israeli settlements could be the sole concern of the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks, new ones come easily within the purview of the U.N. and its principal bodies as additional and new developments that threaten regional peace and security. Surely the U.S. would not want to be seen as spineless on the issue that could torpedo the entire peace package between Israel and the Palestinian side.

The successful convening of the council would present the U.S. and others with yet another rare opportunity to speak out and speak out forcefully on this grave obstacle to peace in the region.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

AL RA'I daily Friday elaborated on His Majesty King Hussein's statements to a visiting delegation from the American-Jewish Congress by stressing that the Kingdom will not suffice itself with its peace treaty with Israel but will pursue all efforts to achieve comprehensive peace on all tracks. The daily said that peace based on U.N. resolutions and in line with the aspirations of the Madrid conference is all that Jordan seeks to achieve. The paper echoed the King's words that Jordan was totally committed to peace based on justice and said that the peace treaty with Israel did not constitute a unilateral move because all the other Arab parties had sought to achieve Israeli withdrawal from Arab land in exchange for peace and in line with the aspirations of the Madrid conference. The achievements so far accomplished as a result of the peace treaty came as a result of Jordan's firm and principled stand and to fulfil the aspirations of the Jordanian people who have regained sovereignty over their land and water resources, said the paper. It said that Jordan has set a good example for the other Arab countries involved in the peace process and reaffirmed the Arab national rights by word and deed.

A WRITER in **Al Dustour** urged the government to bring about meaningful change in its information policies, especially in handling news and events at the local and regional levels. Mohammad Daoud said that what the country requires is a real improvement in its information services in terms of reporting events and the way the news is presented to the listeners and the readers. He said that news and other programmes on radio and television are tedious and boring. He said the Information Ministry ought to provide constant training for its staff and enlist the help of experts to bring about the required change for the better. He said that Jordan ought to follow in the footsteps of the advanced nations, which have constantly developed their information services to better serve the public and meet the challenges of the modern age.

Jordnaian Perspective

By Dr. Musa Keilani

Jordan has to rise to the economic challenge

WE ARE into the seventh year of our economic restructuring programme and the fifth month after the signing of the peace treaty with Israel. Both are of key utmost significance to every Jordanian who seeks to improve his/her own standard of living as part of the national moves towards increased self-reliance in an atmosphere of security, stability and peace.

The economic restructuring programme agreed with the Internationay Monetary Fund (IMF) and supported by the World Bank has made major advances in addressing some of our major problems and we are almost there in terms of regaining our country's international credit rating that we enjoyed before the economic crisis of 1988-89. The most difficult parts of the programme have been successfully implemented (although not without drawing the usual controversy that is attached to implementing any economic correction programme).

Indeed, it is often said that Jordan, in terms of government adherence to the stipulations of the programme, stands out as an example for many Third World countries which have similar problems as the Kingdom had. So, we do have an international reputation.

The peace treaty that we signed with Israel in October was indeed the most important event in the life of Jordanians, perhaps more so in the case of generations born in the 30s and 40s who have had firsthand experience with the torment of the days of the 1948 war and what ensued thereafter.

Now that the decades of hostilities, instability, uncertainty and sense of insecurity are behind us afte the signing of the peace treaty, it is only logical for Jordanians to expect reap the benefits of peace in terms of economic dividends, particularly given that the local economic and monetary scene has undergone dramatic changes since 1989.

But the perceptions of those dividends differ among Jordanians.

For many, it meant the wishful thinking of the international community pumping billions of dollars into the Jordanian economy. And that is where the disappointment has come, five months after the signing of the treaty.

The affirmations by our leaders, His Majesty King Hussein, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan and others, that the fruits of peace would not materialise overnight are clearly aimed at the segment of the population which expected cost of living to go down, the government to provide increased services and employment opportunities to materialise at every turn in the few weeks after the signing of the peace treaty. Indeed this segment is disappointed.

But then what we have to realise is that it is largely dependent on us and our behaviour at a level that determines whether our dreams could be realised.

A closer look at our economic situation and the parameters that guide any improvement in the economy of any country would clearly indicate a few realities:

— We have come a long way from the crises of 1988-89, but are not yet fully there in terms of achieving the full objectives of the restructuring programme; i.e. a zero-deficit budget in all that it entails; an economic growth of around 10 per cent based on national production and exports, and unemployment at manageable levels (say around three to five per cent). These goals could be met in another couple of years if firm determination accompanies every step of our way.

Of course, the way Jordan recovered itself from one of the most difficult crises ever to hit a country with similar features was spectacular. And it is appreciated by the international community and the donor nations.

That is a plus point in our favour, and a big plus at that.

— Parallel to the economic programme, if we compare the improvements in our investment climate, the reality is something else.

For many of us, the sacrifices that we had to make in order to ensure the success of the economic restructuring programme were high and those in themselves should have gone a long way in making our country attractive to foreign and local investments.

That perception is mistake number one. What we did in the past four/five years was simply to raise the performance of our economy from a totally unacceptable level to somewhere near acceptable levels, and we have to go much further in this direction.

Considering that the definition of an investment climate conducive to investment, both local and foreign, starts somewhere far above an acceptable level of economic performance, it is clear that Jordan cannot yet boast itself of offering such a climate.

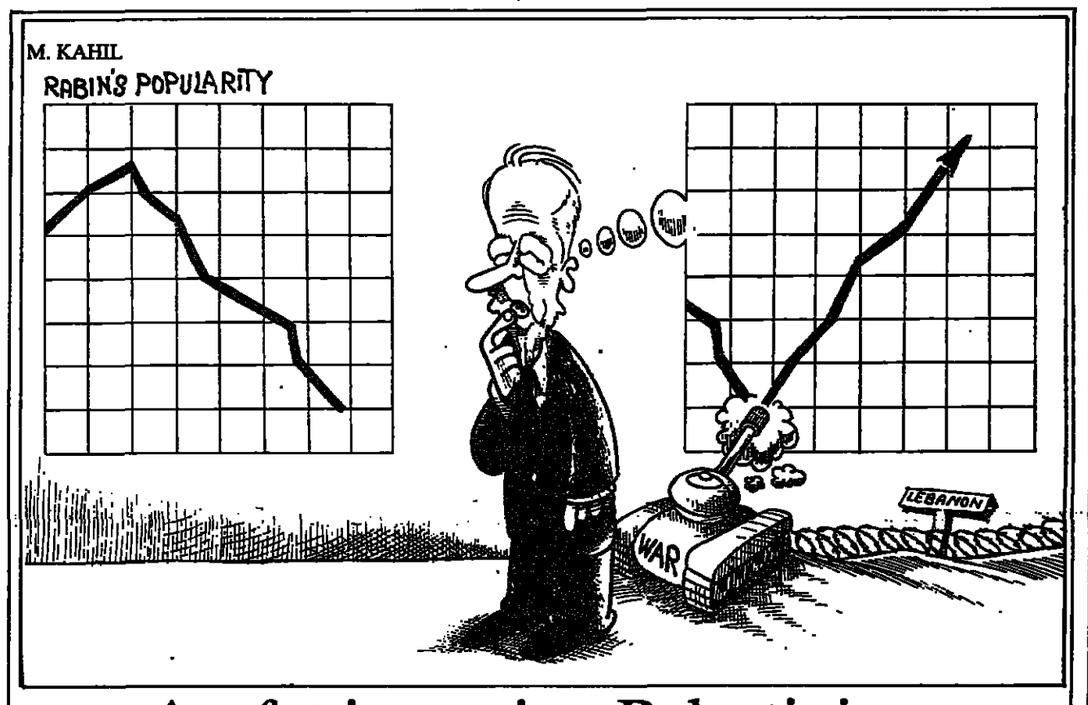
There are many factors that influence an investor and many of those deal with legislation, incentives, quality of life etc. But beyond them, the necessity factor is administrative efficiency.

There has been a marked lethargy on the part of the middle-level bureaucracy to adapt itself to the requirements of the day. What we see today in our government offices and departments is not much different from what we saw in the 80s, mostly in terms of the same inefficiency stemming from a lack of commitment and devotion to work.

Quite simply, it seems that the vision of the inevitable sweeping changes that we have to undertake in our approach any way of thinking and method of working is limited to our leadership. Only a few of our bureaucrats, long used to an air of dispensing favours from in their traditional chairs while doing what they are being paid for, appreciate or realise the importance of those changes to our life at every level.

How do we go about changing this attitude? Can we afford to have a potential investor come to us with all sincere intentions only to be spooked away if only because of the bureaucratic monster that faces him in our offices?

That is the biggest challenge facing us, and the battle, since it involves a way of behaviour developed over decades, could be as tough as the battle for peace. But it is a battle that has to be fought and heads have to roll if the battle has to be won.



Arafat is serving Palestinian cause by staying in Gaza

By Elia Nasrallah

THE DEADLOCK in the Israeli-Palestinian talks on the implementation of the Oslo agreement, the situation in the Middle East in the light of Israel's intransigent position and a host of domestic affairs featured prominently in the editorial and the columnists' writings in the local press last week.

A writer in Al Ra'i daily supported a decision by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to keep the Palestinian leadership inside the Palestinian lands rather than moving its headquarters back to Tunis. Tareq Masarweh said that the presence of the Palestinian leadership on Palestinian soil has its own benefits for the Palestinian people and the leadership itself because it will be close to the scene of events and closer to the Israeli leaders for continued efforts to find a solution to the deadlock in the Palestinian Israeli negotiations. The writer said that the former Palestinian leader Amin Husseini, who led the struggle in 1948, should have remained steadfast on Palestinian soil rather than seek refuge in Arab states as he could achieveda bette stand for the Palestinians and could have negotiated with the Israeli rulers a peaceful settlement.

He said the Palestinian leadership ought to remain steadfast and try by all means to reach a solution with the Israelis.

Despite the obstacles laid by the Israelis in the path of a settlement, the Palestinian leadership has chosen the right path by remaining steadfast in its effort to force the Israelis to implement the Oslo and Cairo agreements, said Sultan Al Hattab, a writer in Al Ra'i daily.

Mr. Arafat's adherence to the peace process, his decision to keep the leadership on Palestinian soil and his determination to launch a world-wide campaign to force the Israelis to comply with U.N. resolutions and the Oslo and Cairo deals were wise and brave, said the writer. Having realised that the peace process could not achieve the aspirations of the Palestinian people through inter-Arab efforts, Mr. Arafat has rightly decided to cling hard to the peace deals with Israel and gather support for his legitimate stand at the international level, said the writer.

Ibrahim Al Absi, another writer in Al Ra'i, held a different view. He said that now that the Palestinians have proven that the Israelis are not willing to abide by the Oslo agreement, they ought to freeze all negotiations with the Jewish state until further notice.

awaiting a miracle to happen but must continue the endeavours on all fronts and should remain in Gaza, which is part of the land of Palestine.

While Mr. Arafat continues to struggle against Israel and seeks a way out of the deadlock, in his talks with Israel, some Palestinian voices are demanding that he return to Tunis, according to Issa Shueibi in Al Dustour. But, said the writer, Mr. Arafat has taken the right decision and decided to expose Israel's intransigence to the world and to the peace groups inside the Israeli society. Resorting to exile in Tunis and abandoning the Palestinian people under occupation would have achieved nothing for Mr. Arafat and for his people alike, said the writer.

George Haddad, a writer in Al Dustour, said that

reminded the Arabs of the historical events since the start of the Jewish presence in Palestine. The writer said that the Arabs rejected the Balfour Declaration earlier this century and so they paved ground for the Western powers to establish a Jewish entity in Palestine. In 1947, the Arabs refused the partition of Palestine and in 1967 Jordan refused to regain the West Bank through peace and a settlement with Israel and the result was catastrophic for the Arabs, said the writer. He said had Jordan refused to reach a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, future generations would have said that Jordan was wrong and should have accepted the deal then.

Mohammad Qudah, a writer in Al Ra'i, said that the Arab masses wonder whether Israel is turly oriented towards peace with the Arabs in light of its behaviour towards the Palestinians in the occupied lands and its insistence to hold on to mass destruction weapons. The writer said that the Israelis do not want to respect their treaties and agreements with the Palestinians and the Arabs at large and continue to hold on to their policies and are intent on imposing capitulation on the Arabs through intimidation. The writer said that no gennine peace can be achieved unless the Israelis change their position and respond to the requirements of a lasting settlement.

A writer in Al Dustour lauded the government's decision to sell most of its shares in the Jordanian Hotels and Tourist Rest houses Comapny to the public as a step in the right direction. Mohammad Daoud said that by taking this step the government has invited investors to increase their activities and boost the private sector's operations.

THE WEEK IN PRINT

It has become clear, he said, that Israel does not want to redeploy its forces in Palestinian lands, refuses to arrange for Palestinian elections and continues its Jewish settlement programme. These stands, he added, are sufficient proof that the Israelis are not working to achieve permanent peace.

Addressing the differences within the Palestinian leadership, Taher Al Adwan, a writer in Al Dustour, said that Mr. Arafat did well in turning down calls by Palestinians to return to Tunis because such a step would mean he was abandoning his people.

Mr. Arafat would have lost credibility as a leader of his nation had he chosen to abandon the land of Palestine because of his frustration over Israel's intransigence, said the writer. He said that Mr. Arafat should not return to exile in Tunis

Israel is refusing to implement its deals with the Palestinians in the hope that more differences among the Palestinians would be created as a result of frustration. The writer said that the Rabin government is hoping that Mr. Arafat would crack down on the opposition groups, like Hamas, thus leading the Palestinians to a civil strife which would please the Israeli government. To make matters difficult for Mr. Arafat, the Israelis are holding on to their own hardline positions and refusing to implement the agreements with the Palestinians, thus encouraging the opposition to denounce Mr. Arafat and the Palestine National Authority (PNA) — a move that could lead to civil strife, according to the writer.

Defending the Jordan-Israel peace treaty, Fahd Al Fanek, a writer in Al Ra'i,

NATO's offer on Mediterranean raises ripple of excitement

By Frederick Bonnart

BRUSSELS — NATO's recent offer of a direct dialogue with five countries south of the Mediterranean raised a ripple of excitement and a number of questions. Was an extension to the south envisaged to complement that to the easy? Would the organisation take a hand in the faltering Middle East peace process? Did it intend to become involved in violent confrontation in North Africa? Was it only trying to find another role to justify its existence?

Allied diplomats say the initiative was intended merely to achieve better mutual understanding, inform Mediterranean governments about NATO's peacekeeping potential, and demonstrate its interest in security in an unstable region. Extension of this dialogue to other Mediterranean countries was envisaged for the future. It was in keeping with alliance concerns to strength regional stability mentioned at the June and December 1994 foreign ministers' meetings. And action had been urged by French Defence Minister François Léotard at the informed meeting of defence ministers in Seville in September.

This is no doubt true as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. The nub is in what has been left unsaid.

The approach was made to Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Israel. The two countries on the Mediterranean's southern shores omitted from it are Algeria and Libya.

NATO's southern members, in particular France, Italy and Spain, are under increasing economic and demographic pressure from across the water. They worry about infiltration of terrorists and about the dangers of the large numbers of their nationals who live in those countries.

NATO points out that initial contacts are merely at ambassador level in Brussels, and that no further significance should be read into them. But a move such as this is highly political. So it is necessary to be clear about its aim, and to assess consequences.

The approach will be judged in the light of statements about the dangers of international terrorism on the one hand and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction on the other. NATO's secretary general, Willy Claes, has called fundamentalism the greatest present threat. In a recent speech he pointed out NATO's ability to act independently of the United Nations if necessary.

The confrontation in Algeria is taking an increasing toll. External force may be considered essential to rescue foreign residents there, and perhaps to safeguard the supply of gas and oil to Europe.

Taken together, all this will have an effect on governments in the countries contacted as well as on those left out, and simulatenously on the various opposition movements, whether violent or democratic. Their interpretation of the NATO move is likely to be far-reaching. The alliance will be understood to be aligning itself with one of the sides in the ongoing troubles, and further action will then be expected of it.

The question that NATO should ask itself is what action it is willing to undertake in support of stability in the region, and whether it is able to carry it out.

Its peacekeeping record in the Yugoslav crisis — the first and only such activity — has come under considerable criticism. NATO has correctly pointed out that this is unjust, as it did in fact carry out all that was asked of it, and its hands were tied by United Nations rulings. But the world has seen intervention as a failure to assume a role that it considers to be one of its major or functions in the post-cold war setting.

This judgment is based on a profound misunderstanding of the nature of the organisation. In the 45 years of its existence NATO has built up a highly effective multinational military mechanism with a political superstructure that can set it in motion almost immediately. But NATO is a fully democratic organisation, which can act only if all its members so decide.

The mechanism worked extremely well in the Yugoslav emergency, to the degree of action that had been agreed upon. What was lacking was the political will to go any further.

The consequent loss of credibility has undermined public support for NATO. If the alliance now intends to deal with another crisis, it should first be clear about the resources it has available for possible intervention and the will to carry it through.

Full prior agreement should be obtained that, if force is to be employed, members are prepared to commit it massively to ensure success. The political and economic consequences of a military success should also be envisaged.

Finally, there should be complete clarity about the effect of another failure. It might spell the doom of the alliance.

The writer is editor of NATO's Sixteen Nations, an independent military journal published in Brussels. This comment is reprinted from the International Herald Tribune.

Featu

By Alistair Lyon
Reuter

ISLAMABAD — The rise of a new Islamic studen force has dealt a possibly fatal blow to a U.N. peace plan for Afghanistan, bu the militia, known as Tale ban, now faces a tough dilemma over whether to fight or negotiate.

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A police patrol whi in the area at the time

Afghan Islamic force stalls U.N. peace plan

By Alistair Lyon
Reuter

ISLAMABAD — The rise of a new Islamic student force has dealt a possibly fatal blow to a U.N. peace plan for Afghanistan, but the militia, known as Taleban, now faces a tough dilemma over whether to fight or negotiate.

U.N. special envoy Mahmoud Mestiri is trying to rescue a stalled plan that envisaged that President Burhanuddin Rabbani would hand over power early this week to a "mechanism" of 30 broadly representative Afghan political leaders.

"I would not describe it as a failure," he said after flying to Islamabad from Kabul on Tuesday to consult prominent Afghans due to take part in the handover process.

Mr. Mestiri returned to Kabul on Wednesday and U.N. officials said he would hold another round of talks with the Taleban and the government before making an announcement about his mission.

Arrangements for the end of Mr. Rabbani's self-extended term, now eight weeks overdue, began to fray after the previously little-known Taleban reached the gates of Kabul on Feb. 14.

Their heavily armed fighters, who had ousted main opposition leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar from his strongholds south of the Afghan capital, want pro-Rabbani fighters to lay down their arms and let them enter the city unopposed.

Mr. Rabbani's forces, led by famed guerrilla commander Ahmad Shah Masood, have responded by fortifying their positions.

The president himself has put off any transfer of power by insisting on changes in the U.N.-proposed mechanism, including representation for the Taleban, U.N. officials say.

Mr. Mestiri had wanted Mr. Rabbani to make way for a representative body that would then decide on how to rebuild the country's shattered political and military institutions.

"That has not succeeded," a U.N. official said. "The Taleban's emergence has drastically changed the Afghan scene."

The Taleban, recruited initially from Afghan refugees at religious schools in Pakistan, captured the southern city of Kandahar in early November.

Then they pushed through eastern Afghanistan, saying they aimed to sweep away warring Mujahideen factions, clear gunmen off roads and install an Islamic state.

The Taleban, face to face with the battle-hardened forces of Mr. Rabbani and Mr. Masood in Kabul, now face a stark choice, said Hamid Gul, a former Pakistani intelligence chief who funnelled aid to Mujahideen groups during the 1979-89 Soviet occupation.

"If they continue to press for their declared objectives... then inevitably they will clash with Masood, who is not going to give up Kabul easily," Mr. Gul told Reuters in an interview.

"Masood has regular forces at his command and considerable fire-power. The Taleban so far have not experienced any worthwhile resistance. So really they have had no experience in fighting, particularly with heavy weapons," he said.

Mr. Gul said the Taleban would suffer a setback in any direct clash with Mr. Masood. "If there is an uprising within Kabul in support of Taleban, it could be a different matter," he added.

On the other hand, if the Taleban accepted the U.N. peace formula, it would seem as if their sole aim had been to remove Mr. Hekmatyar and become yet another power-hungry faction, Mr. Gul said.

"This would be politically very damaging for the Taleban. I fear that if they go for this second option, their popularity will go down as quickly as it has gone up," he said.

So far, Taleban leaders have refused to share power with what they see as "criminal" Mujahideen factions whose feuding has killed 25,000 Afghans since the collapse of a communist government in Kabul in April, 1992.

Their conditions for taking part in the U.N. process are that a "neutral" security force, meaning their own militia, take over Kabul, members of the interim body be "good Muslims" and any future Afghan government be truly Islamic.

Mr. Mestiri has vowed not to give up his search for a solution, but U.N. officials said it was hard to reconcile the rigid demands made by the Taleban and the government side.

"If both sides are totally inflexible, that is where things should be laid to rest, but we are not at that stage yet," a U.N. official, who asked not to be further identified, said.

He agreed the Taleban faced a difficult choice between attacking Kabul, thus setting off a new round of bloodletting, and sitting down with the faction leaders they despise.

"An all-out confrontation between the Taleban and Masood is possible, but unlikely," he said. "All kinds of quiet contacts are going on between them and other groups."

An Afghan fighter of the Taliban Islamics faction guards a road on the southeastern frontline of Kabul. The U.N. peace plan for Afghanistan was plunged into uncertainty after Taliban Islamic militants were reported to have set stiff conditions for a transfer of power (AFP photo)

Jordan fully backs mediation

(Continued from page 1)

bolster inter-Arab action in various domains.

"While welcoming Saudi Arabia's efforts, the government also expresses its satisfaction and appreciation of Saudi Arabia's endeavours to end the dispute through dialogue and negotiation.

"Jordan has always called for inter-Arab dialogue to settle disputes among Arab countries."

The statement also expressed Jordan's hope that the Saudi effort at mediation to settle the dispute would be successful.

The dispute involves the Hawar Island, which is claimed by both Bahrain and Qatar. The island itself and the reef surrounding it are believed to be rich in oil-resources. In addition, the area is a rich fishing ground and a haven for pearl divers.

Qatar offered to withdraw its request for a ruling on the dispute from the international Court of Justice two weeks ago, after the court said it considered itself competent to judge the case.

The Saudi government said immediately thereafter that it was willing to mediate the dispute. Bahrain welcomed the offer, but Qatar sounded sceptical over its perceptions of success of such mediation.

Since the dispute broke to the surface with a military clash in 1986, when Qatari forces seized 29 employees of a Dutch company building a Bahraini coast guard station on the Fasht Al Dibal reef, Jordan has called for Arab mediation to settle the issue.

The company workers were released unharmed after 17 days but the dispute remained unresolved. In 1991, Qatar took the case to the International Court of Justice after saying Saudi mediation had failed to find a solution to the conflict.

Russians hit Chechens outside Grozny

(Continued from page 1)

former Soviet Union, saying incidents like Chechenya should not affect the "big picture" of support for reforms in Moscow.

Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott argued that while the Chechenya war might have damaged Moscow's own interests, it would be self-defeating for the United States to reverse policy because of it.

Russian officials said on Friday that 1,146 servicemen had been killed and a further 5,000 had been wounded or fallen ill in the 11-week conflict.

Colonel-General Dmitry Volkogonov, head of the presidential commission on prisoners-of-war, also told a news conference that 274 soldiers were missing. This figure also included some unidentified corpses.

"An officer and a soldier died overnight in Chechen shelling. They are included in the death toll," he said.

Estimates for Russian dead vary wildly, with some putting the total significantly higher. The Russian human rights commission says 25,000 civilians have died in the conflict.

"I work with the people who have the details... I have the most accurate figures," Gen. Volkogonov said. "I respect the figures the mass media has passed on to the public, but they are not always accurate."

Gen. Volkogonov said his commission had very rough data which indicated around 1,000 Chechen rebels had died so far, but said the information had to be checked thoroughly.

Diplomat doing well after attack

(Continued from page 1)

tion of her husband, and later the police. This account, however could not be confirmed by other sources.

French embassy sources would only say that it was an "accident" and said they were "disappointed" that the international news agencies had revealed the identity of the diplomat before his family was notified in France.

Agence France Presse identified the assailants as Salem Abdullah and Ahmad Qasem. The two hail from Karak, according to sources.

A police patrol which was in the area at the time of the incident immediately arrested the two, security sources said.

Mr. Hein, fluent in Arabic and English, was initially transferred to Madaba hospital and then flown by helicopter to Al Hussein Medical City where he underwent surgery to remove the bullet and treat the wound. The diplomat was expected to stay in hospital for a few days.

"The injury is not serious," said a senior medical source at the hospital, adding that the patient was in "good condition."

French-U.S. war of words

(Continued from page 1)

find out about the policy of the French government."

"That is unacceptable," he said. "What is most important is not that it has been made public but that it went on at all," he said.

On the question of the leak, Mr. Pasqua said Ambassador Harriman had said she could not guarantee confidentiality.

Mr. Harriman replied "that she could not do so because the services were in the know," he told Le Monde.

The U.S. embassy in Paris retorted that it had "scrupulously respected the confidentiality agreed on during Ambassador Harriman's first meeting" with Mr. Pasqua on Jan. 26.

U.S. officials and many French commentators have suggested the leak was a bid by Mr. Pasqua's office to divert attention from a wiretap scandal threatening the political fortunes of both Mr. Pasqua and Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, who is running for the presidency in elections only two months away.

Mr. Pasqua's apparent outrage also sits oddly with the muted reaction to the U.S. claims two years ago to have caught French "businessmen" engaging in their own industrial espionage for France.

In Abidjan, the minister denied that the eruption of the spying row was a domestic issue, saying "there is no Franco-French affair."

"Personally, I am French interior minister. I am therefore in charge of French interests," he said. He criticised Foreign Minister Alain Juppe, who is a key supporter of Mr. Balladur's main right-wing rival, Paris Mayor Jacques Chirac, and who has questioned the leaking of the spy row.

The Wall Street Journal, the top U.S. business daily lambasted France for the spy row, humorously suggesting there are no French trade secrets worth stealing and accusing France of trying to steal U.S. research.

Le Monde's sources said there were 80 U.S. intelligence agents in France, the journal said, adding: "Gracious, are there really that many riches for spies to mine in France, or is the CIA just wasting money again?"

"It was our impression that the realy good stuff was to be found in Silicon Valley and other American high-tech lodes and that French snoopers in the U.S. have far more to gain than American snoopers in France," the newspaper editorialised.

Some U.S. aerospace companies, it said, boycotted the last Paris air show because of French companies trying to steal their secrets.

"As for what interest there could be in gleaning France's policy positions, we're stumped. Who needed spies to determine that France would play hardball on GATT for example?" it said.

U.S. moves to write off debts

(Continued from page 1)

"There is every seriousness on the part of the administration to see that the process goes through as orginally proposed," she said.

The sub-committee reduction of the outlay was part of cuts of $191 million it introduced to the FY 1995 Supplemental as part of a Republican budget-slashing to pay for disaster aid, mostly in California, and make good on the Republican Party's promises of tax cuts.

According to Washington watchers, the Republicans, who now dominate the House of Representatives after a 40-year hiatus, are traditionally known to be "fiscally conservative" and are seen as less sensitive to the impact of foreign aid cuts on American foreign policy than the Senate, and therefore the reduction proposed by the sub-committee was not unexpected.

But it will be "a different story" in the Senate, according to experts.

"The Senate can relate more to foreign policy issues and the importance of aid," said an expert on internal American politics. "It is easier for the administration to deal with the Senate on foreign policy and aid issues than with the House of Representatives."

Furthermore, there is widely shared consensus that the U.S. Congress as a whole appreciates Jordan's contribution to the Middle East peace process and the difficulties facing the Kingdom in its endeavours to meet the requirements of peace after signing the Oct. 26 peace treaty with Israel.

Th net asssessment of experts is that Jordan does not really have to worry about the promised write-off of debts and that the Clinton administration would make the necessary moves in the "give-and-take" deals that cap the process of foreign appropriations between the House of Representatives and the Senate.

In the meantime, the administration has also proposed economic and military aid to Jordan worth $44.2 million — $31.2 million in military aid, $7.2 million in economic support assistance and $5.2 million in population assistance — in fiscal 1996. The proposal was contained in the draft budget for FY 1996 that the administration sent to Congress last week.

The amount reflects "a considerable increase" over the corresponding figure for FY 1995, noted the expert.

The U.S. lawmakers have not taken up debate on the draft budget yet.

Lebanon seeks U.S. pressure

(Continued from page 1)

was later eased, although it was not clear whether that was a result of diplomatic pressure.

Gunboat crew told fishermen through loudspeakers that they were allowed to operate in waters north of the city.

A few dozen sailed out and returned with half-full nets. But none ventured out of Tyre or Zahrani, where the ban remained unchaged.

The blockade was imposed 16 days ago on the ancient Phoenician port of Tyre, the most southern of Lebanon's ports, and was expanded to Zahrani and Sidon Thursday.

It has no military significance and was apparently intended to put political pressure on the Lebanese government by depriving some 1,300 fishermen of their livelihood.

Israel has been pressing the Beirut government to disarm Hizbollah, which is fighting the Israelis in South Lebanon, as a precondition for considering a withdrawal from the region.

But Lebanon contends Israel must withdraw first and has pledged to deploy up to 30,000 troops in the south to prevent attacks.

Hizbollah heads a guerrilla war to drive the Israelis out of the border strip, known as the "security zone," which they have occupied since 1985 as a buffer against guerrilla raids.

Hizbollah's parade was staged in Beirut's southern slums to mark Jerusalem Day, which Iran sponsors on the final Friday of the Holy month of Ramadan, to protest Israel's seizure of the eastern Arab half of the city in the 1967 Middle East war.

Hizbollah's leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, warned in a speech that his guerrillas would shell northern Israeli towns if Lebanese population centres in the south were bombarded from the occupied zone.

"That's our right and we shall exercise it at the time we choose. We shall not allow Israel to drag us into a battle of its own timing," he told cheering crowds.

As he spoke, two Israeli jets crashed the sound barrier overhead, causing sonic booms that reverberated across Beirut.

Kabul balance shifts

(Continued from page 1)

role proportionate to their military strength.'

"We are not for a monopoly (of power) by any side," observed Mr. Morad.

U.N. special envoy Mohammad Mestiri announced plans last Wednesday to delay the power transfer to a neutral authority by one month to March 21, the start of the Afghan new year.

The transfer was to have taken place on Feb. 21, but a last-minute dispute over the role of the Talibans forced the postponement.

Mr. Morad told reporters it was up to Mr. Mestiri and Mr. Rabbani to agree to the interim authority's composition.

"It is not important for us that the transfer of power happens on March 21," he said. "It could even happen before that. What is important is that the interim authority is ready, and only Mahmoud Mestiri and President Rabbani can agree when that time is."

"How can the transfer of power happen to an incomplete mechanism?" he asked.

His statement contradicted earlier comments by Mr. Mestiri, who said Mr. Rabbani had given him an unconditional undertaking to step aside on the Afghan new year.

The dispute last time was over the involvement of Talibans, which forced its way onto the Afghan political and military landscape in a dramatic advance through a third of the country's 30 provinces.

Arafat back in Gaza after Saudi talks

(Continued from page 1)

last Friday of the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Many worshippers were allowed in from the West Bank despite a closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip imposed Jan. 22 after the suicide bombing.

The prayers ended without incident and Police Minister Moshe Shahal said Israel would consider a further easing of the closure next week.

"The closure isn't an end in itself, only a measure to increase security and avoid friction between Israelis and Palestinians," Mr. Shahal told reporters in Jerusalem.

At Al Aqsa, Palestinians stood shoulder-to-shoulder to listen to a fiery sermon by clergyman Yousef Abu Sneineh.

"You have come to prove that Jerusalem is an Islamic city," Sheikh Abu Sneineh told the crowd. He complained that Israeli rule "still weighs on us, the closure and starvation is a burden on us."

The closure has barred all but a few thousand Palestionian labourers from reaching jobs in Israel, denying many a livelihood for more than a month.

Ramadan prayers also ended without incident at the Ibrahimi Mosque in the tense city of Hebron. The site is holy to both Muslims and Jews. Jewish worshippers were barred from the site for a day Friday to avoid frictions with the Palestinians.

Soldiers detained four Israeli left-wingers who tried to stage a solidarity demonstration with Palestinians in Hebron and ignored orders by troops to leave the area.

In the West Bank town of Nablus, meanwhile, dozens of youths threw stones at Israeli soldiers who responded by firing rubber bullets and tear-gas. Two Palestinians were hurt and 20 arrested, Israeli reports said.

Near the West Bank town of Ramallah, Palestinians threw a firebomb at an Israeli bus, shattering the windshield. No one was hurt.

Iran meanwhile renewed its call for Israel's destruction as tens of thousands of people took to the streets of the capital to mark Jerusalem Day on Friday.

Israel is a "racist, illegitimate and usurper regime which should be destroyed," Parliament Speaker Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri told a crowd gathered in Tehran University.

The Jewish state is a "cancerous tumor whose existence we will never accept," President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani told the crowd, who were also gathered for the weekly prayers.

After the 1979 revolution, Iran's late founder of the Islamic republic declared the last Friday in the fasting month of Ramadan as international Jerusalem Day to express Muslim solidarity with the Palestinians.

The crowd punched the air with their fists, chanted "Death to Israel," and waved placards in support of the Palestinian uprising converging on the university from all the directions.

Hundreds of buses unloaded people at the site of the demonstration, including soldiers, scouts and young volunteers wearing headbands to show their willingness to be "martyrs for Islam."

Charity boxes were set up every few metres to collect money for the Palestinian cause. "If your shout does not reach Palestine, your money will," urged one attendant through a loudspeaker.

"What is at stake is not just a limited land and population, but Israel's domination over the entire region," Mr. Nateq Nuri warned.

"The Zionists seek to extend their military, political and economic influence throughout the entire Islamic-Arab World," he said. "The Zionists are about to realise their big dream of expansionism from the Nile to the Euphrates."

"Israel has entered the Persian Gulf and is discussing oil deals and security issues. It will take part in joint military manoeuvres in the near future in the region," added the speaker, an influential figure.

Baghdad

(Continued from page 12)

openness of the Iraqi side," he said.

Mr. Ekeus said he was pleased with the progress made to put the long-term monitoring of Iraq's arms industry in place but needed Baghdad's help for a full accounting of weapons prohibited under the ceasefire terms.

"The more thorny item is to get Iraq to declare to us all prohibited weapons to ensure that these weapons are eliminated in addition to components, materials and capabilities," he said.

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Hike in German interest rates will negatively affect the dollar

The following report, covering the period from Thursday, Feb. 16, 1995 until Wednesday, Feb. 22, 1995, is provided by Naser Nabulsi, private client group at Merrill Lynch-Dubai

FUNDAMENTAL VIEW: The dollar plummeted to a 28-month low against the Deutschemark and continues to be weak against the yen. Ongoing concerns about Mexico economic crisis and delay in finalising the aid package seems to have taken a toll on the dollar. The dollar's woes were compounded by speculation that the Bundesbank will raise rates earlier than expected. If the Bundesbank does hike rates, narrowing the U.S.-German interest differential, that should be negative for the dollar. Another concern for the dollar is that Japan's earthquake, which caused an estimated $100 billion in damage, could push up Japan's long-term interest rates keeping Japanese money at home and putting upward pressure on the yen.

We still believe that the Fed will eventually tighten policy enough to boost the dollar to the JPY/USD 105 and DM/USD 1.60-to-1.65 levels over the next six months. Longer-term, however, the case for yen strength based on Japan's large trade surplus and small appetite for dollar risk remain intact. We continue to expect the yen to trade around JPY/USD 95 on a 12-month view.

Technical View: Last week, dollar weakness against the European currences and the Japanese yen offset strength versus both the Australian and Canadian dollars. As a result, the U.S. dollar index fell 1.5 per cent. This was the second consecutive weekly decline. Despite a sentiment background for the dollar that is neutral at worst, short term momentum is deteriorating. Moreover — and perhaps more importantly — medium term momentum is coming off of its most overbought levels in 12 months and appears to have the potential to remain under pressure into the first part of April.

Thus, the prospects for a test of at least the October low at 84.91 seem reasonably good; a break of that level would allow for 83.00. Important resistance exists just above 90.00.

Japanese yen

Fundamental View: The dollar has been in a steady decline against the yen dropping to JPY/USD 97.08. Despite seven interest rate hikes by the Federal Reserve over the last year and 12-month interest rate spreads of more than 430 points in favour of the U.S., the dollar continues to be weak against the yen. The poor appetite of Japanese investors for dollar securities despite the rise in U.S. interest rates over the last year could perhaps be explained by the cumulative foreign exchange losses that Japan suffered due to dollar weakness since the early 1980s. We recently estimated these losses to now amount to roughly $400 billion. While Japan's current account surplus in shrinking and is projected to be under $100 billion this year compared to about $125 billion in 1994, that may still imply an excess supply of dollars relative dollar demand by Japan's financial institutions. The financial impact of Japan's earthquake could also eventually turn out to be a negative for the dollar if it helps push up long-term rates in Japan and keeps more Japanese capital at home.

For now, we continue to believe that further fed tightening will eventually give the dollar a modest boost against the yen over the next six months or so. We continue to expect the pair to reach JPY/USD 95 over the next 12 months.

Technical View: The Japanese yen gained 1.7 per cent versus the U.S. dollar during the week ended Feb. 17. The sentiment background for the currency continues to deteriorate and is moving away from its recent oversold readings into neutral territory.

Although short term momentum is near overbought extremes and the currency is beginning to test resistance, medium term momentum has the potential to remain strong through at least the rest of this quarter. Thus, while a near term decline is possible, it is likely that the foundation is being laid for a ful-blown test of the 96-97 Y/U.S.$ area (and possibly beyond) benchmark support remains at 100.80-101.50.

Deutschemark

Fundamental View: The dollar tumbled against the Deutschemark dropping to a 28-month low of DM/USD 1.469, the lowest level since Oct. 16, 1992. There seems to be no respite for the dollar. Initially, the Mexican economic crisis and the delay in finalising the aid package weighed down the dollar. After the aid package was finalised and signed on Tuesday, the dollar failed to get any boost with the market expressing skepticism on whether the aid package will remedy Mexico's financial crisis.

The dollar also lost ground amidst speculation that German rates will rise sooner than expected. The Bundesbank in its February monthly report issued a clear warning on looming inflation risks in Germany, warning that "monetary policy will... resist any increase in inflation." This set off specualtion that the Bundesbank would hike interest rates earlier than expected, giving a boost to the mark.

The mark gained across-the-board in Europe as the British pound, the French franc and the Italian lira weakened due to political incertainty in these countries.

We remain very cautious about the dollar prospects in the next few weeks. Over the next six-to-twelve months, we project modest appreciation of the dollar to the DM/USD 1.60-to-1.65 range, once the current uncertainty settles down.

Technical View: The Deutschemark rallied 2.5 per cent against the U.S. dollar last week making it the strongest currency among the six we most regulary discuss. In so doing, the currency penetrated its high of last October. After recent overbought readings, sentiment is now viewed as neutral. Although medium term momentum oscillators are neutral, they are coming off of their most oversold readings since early 1994 and appear to be able to maintain an upward bias through March. Short term momentum is also currently strong.

With the penetration of last October's high, the way may be being paved for a test of the 1992 high at 1.39-1.41 DM/U.S.$. There is nearby support beginning at 1.536 but the 1.58 area remains benchmark support.

Against the yen, the D-mark gained 0.8 per cent last week. Medium term oscillators have the potential to remain upwardly biased into at least mid March. Resistance exists at 66.60, with trendline support below 64.00.

Pound sterling

Fundamental View: Undermined by political concern and broad-based Deutschemark strength, the British pound trumbled below DM/GBP 2.33 for the first time in two years. At one point, the pound dropped to DM/GBP 2.327 marks, the lowest since the historic low of DM/GBP 2.31 reached on February 25, 1993. The pound made some gains against the dollar to trade around USD/GBP 1.57. The pound's weakness against the DM is largely the result of political uncertainties in the U.K., since the economic fundamentals continue to be good (GDP growth of 4 per cent in 1994 with core inflation rate of 2.8 per cent). The ruling Conservative Party has been torn by conflict over the progress towards greater European integration. The rift in the party is expected to widen if Prime Minister Major goes ahead with a referendum over forging closer links with Europe. There are rumours that Chancellor of Exchequer Ken Clarke will resign if Major goes ahead with the referendum.

Our U.K. analysts attach a low probability to the collapse of John Major's government and fresh general elections. This is based on the premise that anti-Major elements in the Conservative Party will stop short of bringing down the Major government and risk elections at a time when the Conservative Party is trailing very badly in the polls. Nonetheless, political uncertainty is weighing down the pound.

Compounding the pound's woes is the strength the mark is drawing from speculation in the market that German interest rates could rise sooner than expected, narrowing the U.K.-German interest differential. Once the storm in the (political) tea cup blows over, the pound is expected to strengthen and move towards our 12-month forecast of DM/GBP 2.50.

Technical View: The British pound gained 1.2 per cent versus the U.S. dollar during the week ended Feb. 17. Sentiment has improved to neutral. Both short and medium term momentum are bottoming, with the latter likely to remain strong through March. Thus, an important low may be in place. A rally decisively through 1.597-1.602 U.S.$/L could well signal an eventual challenge of the 1994 high at $1638. Nearby support is $1.553-1.544.

Against the DM, sterling fell 1.3 per cent last week. Medium term momentum is weak and appears likely to remain so for seveal more weeks. Next support is likely below 2.33. Resistance exists at 2.38-2.39, then above 2.46.

Swiss franc

Fundamental View: The Swiss franc continued to strengthen against the dollar rising to S.F./USD 1.25. The franc held steady against the Deutschemark around S.F./DM 0.845, one of the few European crosses to hold their own against the surging DM. The franc strength against the dollar is in part a spill over of the DM strength as investors sought refuge in the DM with the peso problems hurting the U.S.$, while political uncertainties cloud the U.K., France and Italy. Switzerland's external balance improved in January, swinging to a surplus of $775 million from a deficit of $135 million in December. For 1994, Switzerland's trade surplus was $2.58 billion, down from the 1993 surplus of $2.77 billion in 1993. A current account surplus is a positive for the franc.

The interest differential is narrowing in favour of the DM and with market expectation that the Bundesbank could raise rates sooner than earlier expected the interest differential should further move in favour of the DM. Our outlook is for franc depreciation and we expect the franc to trade at S.F./USD 1.38 and DM/USD 0.86 in 12-month's time.

Technical View: The Swiss france gained 2.2 per cent versus the greenback during the week ended Feb. 17. Sentiment has improved sharply in recent weeks and is now neutral. Both short and medium term oscillators have bottomed, with the latter likely to remain constructive through much of March. The currency has already entered the benchmark resistance zone at 1.23-1.26 S.F./U.S.$; thus, the potential for a rally though that level has to be respected. If that were to happen, it could represent a significant breakout.

Nearby support exists at 1.30-1.31. The DM cross gained 0.2 per cent last week, but medium term momentum remains under pressure. This, plus the recent unsuccessful challenge of .848-.850 resistance, implies an upcoming test of nearby support at .837 and quite possibly even a test of bechmark support at .828.

Canadian dollar

Fundamental View: The Canadian dollar was steady against the U.S.$ trading around C$/U.S.$ 1.40 as the market awaits the presentation of the federal budget Finance Minister Paul Martin is scheduled to present the 1995-96 federal budget on February 27. Mr. Martin has set a goal of reducing the federal budget deficit to 3 per cent of GDP (U.S.$17.86 billion) by 1996-97. If the government presents a credible plan to reach this target, it should be a positive for C$.

Among the provinces, Alberta, Saskatchewan and new Brunswick presented budgets with a surplus. Three other provinces are also expected to run budget surpluses. Improved budgetary position in the provinces should add to the credibility of the federal government's efforts to rein in Canadian public debt. The finalisation and signing of the Mexican aid package in Washington should remove uncertainty for all dollar-bloc countries, and be a positive for the C$.

Canadian economic fundamentals continue to be good. Real GDP grew at 4.5 per cent 1994 and is projected to grow at 3.4 per cent in 1995. Inflation was 0.2 per cent in 1994 and projected at 2.2 per cent in 1995. We look for the C$ to trade near C$/U.S.$ 1.38 in three-months, C$/U.S.$ 1.34 in six-months and C$/U.S.$ 1.28 in 12 months.

Technical View: The Canadian dollar fell 0.1 per cent against the U.S. dollar last week. Sentiment has moved out of oversold territory into the neutral zone. Short term momentum appears to have peaked, suggesting nearby currency weakness.

However, medium term oscillators are generally constructive, so any upcoming weakness may only serve to set the stage for a potentially important low; this may be particularly true if sentiment indicators move back to oversold levels.

If so, a better challenge of 1.37-1.40 C$/U.S.$ resistance (and possibly higher) may be forthcoming once anticipated near term weakness runs its course.

Important support still exists just beyond 1.42, then $1.44-$1.45.

Australian dollar

Fundamental View: The Australian dollar continues to be weak, dropping to a four-month low of U.S.$/A$ 0.735 before stabilising around U.S.$/A$ 0.74. The A$ weakness is in large part due to weakness in metal commodity prices: The CRB index fell 9.3 per cent since Jan. 24. Also contributing to A$ weakness is the continuing trend towards poor external deficit: The January current account deficit (to be released March 1) is expected to be around $2.2 billion.

Interest rates are weighing down the A$. The RBA after raising official short-term rates 27 basis points since last August to 7.5 per cent is expected to keep rates on hold till April, with Prime Minister Keating advocating a softer monetary policy stance.

Apart from metals, other commodity prices continued to rise led by wool (strong Chinese demand) and coal (Japanese demand). That should be a positive for the A$. Nonetheless, given the other negatives, our revised forecast is for the A$ to trade around U.S.$/A$ 0.74 in 3 months time. For now, our 12-month forecast continues to be U.S.A 0.75, but the risk is on the downside.

Technical View: The Australian dollar declined 1.2 per cent against the U.S. dollar during the week ended Feb. 17, and — for the second straight week — was the weakest currency among the six we most regularly discuss. With the recent weakness, call buying has become apparent again, but put/call ratios are still classified as neutral. Short term momentum oscilators, which were recently at their most oversold levels since September 1993, are attempting to bottom.

However, medium term momentum has peaked and is likely to remain weak through March and possibly beyond. This, plus the currency's inability to get through important resistance beginning at 0.78 U.S.$/A$, suggests that an important top is in place and that any upcoming strength will be short-lived.

Wall Street bull rally may become fatigued

NEW YORK (R) — Sheer momentum should carry Wall Street stocks higher now that the Dow index has cleared the 4,000 level, but most U.S. analysts and money managers said further gains will be limited.

The Dow Jones industrial average closed above the 4,000 level for the first time on Thursday, driven by hopes that a year-long trend of rising U.S. interest rates has ended.

The Dow, made up of the shares of 30 major American corporations traded on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), ended up 30.28 points at 4,003.33.

The breaching of the 4,000 level by the world's most closely watched stock market index marked the fall of a major psychological barrier for Wall Street. The Dow pierced the 3,000-point mark on April 17, 1991.

"I think we'll see 4,100 or 4,200 over the next two or three weeks," said Stanton Feeley, chief investment officer of Sunamerica Asset Management.

One noted market analyst, Elaine Garzarelli said U.S. stocks are in the first phase of a new bull run.

"We're really in the first leg of a new bull market and I think any corrections from here will be very, very limited," Ms. Garzarelli said in an interview.

But analysts say there are risks ahead, ranging from the possibility of renewed inflation, the onset of recession or plain profit-taking after a heady bull market rally.

Few traders were thinking right away about a downturn, however.

The gains were sparked by growing optimism that the Federal Reserve would keep its hands off interest rates for now, after a year of raising them sharply to cool the economy and prevent a rise in inflation.

Advancing issues on the NYSE led declines 1,443 to 778 on Thursday on active trading of more than 394 million shares on the New York Stock Exchange.

By most accounts, Wall Street stocks have been boosted by money coming out of Mexico — which is battling an economic crisis — and other emerging markets.

"Emerging market money that got killed is coming back to our markets," Mr. Feeley said.

Eric Miller, chief investment officer at Donaldson, Lufkin Jenrette Securities Corp., said the bullish mood is likely to continue boosting stocks and bonds for now.

He noted that enthusiasm was whipped up after investors concluded that the Federal Reserve (Fed) would hold interest rates steady for now.

"Personally, I think the economy is still going to be showing a little faster growth," Mr. Miller said. "I'm not as convinced as others" who have decided that the string of higher short-term rates is over.

He said the outlook for stocks also will hinge on corporate earnings. If the Fed sticks to its goal of bringing growth down to a 2.5 per cent rate, then "that implies a much-reduced level of earnings growth", Mr. Miller said.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SATURDAY FEBRUARY 25, 1995

By Thomas S. Pierson, Astrologer, Carroll Righter Foundation

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Analyse your position with friends and know which ones to retain and which ones to let go out of your life for best results and your happiness. Find peace of mind in the PM.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Conditions in the business world may appear strange now, but later you can turn them to your benefit. Be more self assured in all of your activities.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Today you should not rush into a new interest before making a careful study of all the circumstances surrounding it. Take no risks with your reputation at this time. Be cautious.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) Come to a better understanding with one you love. A new contact can bring many benefits your way and will be very pleasant in the PM.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Resolve a problem you have with an associate today and cement better relations with this person. Beware of newcomers who may cause friction around you.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Be sure to finish regular routines today before engaging in amusements. An argument with a friend is not serious, so forget it and it will work out on its own.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Don't try to be forceful with others today or you could regret it later. Don't neglect a worthy friend of long-standing or you may lose him or her altogether.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Be sure to keep your promises made to family members now. A new project needs more study before going ahead, otherwise there could be problems.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Be more objective in dealing with others now and get better results. Use extreme caution in motion and avoid any possible accident.

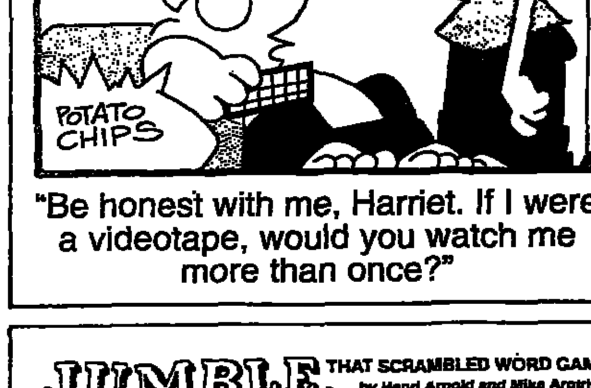
CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Plan how to save more money today instead of spending more than you can afford. Show others that you have wisdom in any endeavour you are involved with.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) Now is the time to be calm and serene while going after a personal aim. Be sure to use money wisely at all times today to get the most from each dollar.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Taking on a martyr complex will get you nothing at this juncture. Quietly get things done today in a sure and positive manner that will bring you the best results.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen



"Be honest with me, Harriet. If I were a videotape, would you watch me more than once?"

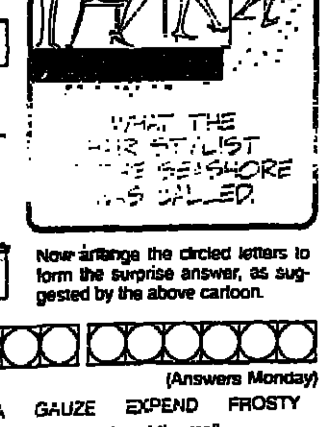
JUMBLE® THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

BAYBE

ROCKA

DETHOB



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer: A

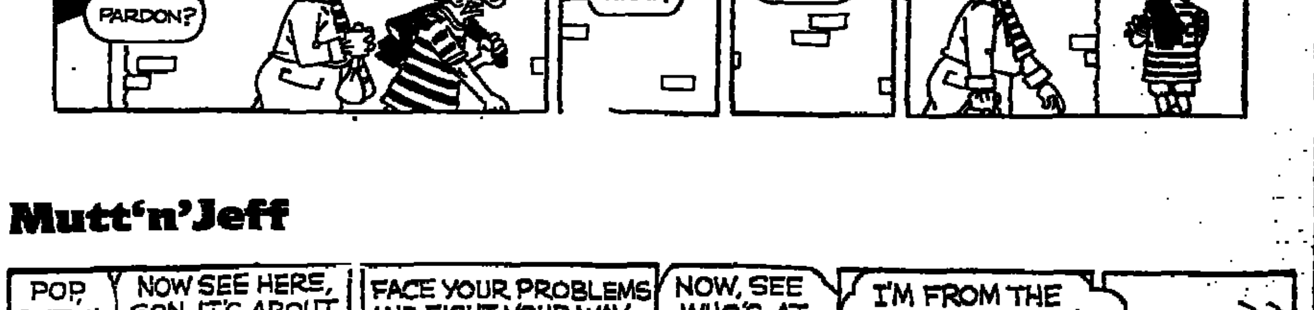
(Answers Monday)

Yesterday's Jumbles: HENNA GAUZE EXPEND FROSTY

Answer: How Dad felt after a day at the mall — "SPENT."

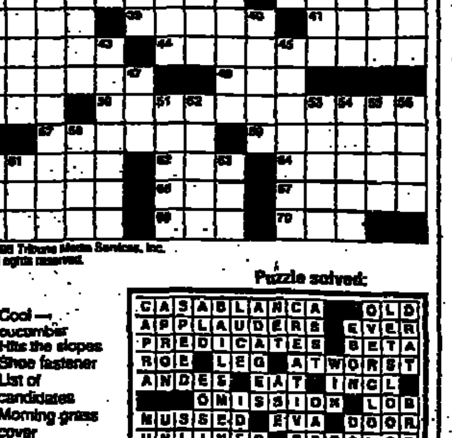
Peanuts

Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff

THE Daily Crossword by Stanley Whitten



ACROSS
1 Blanc or Brooks
4 Damage
7 Pacific island group
12 Drudge
14 St.
15 Trims
16 Actress Black
17 Vigor
18 Lasso
19 Cake toppings
21 Buy back
23 Triple Crown winner
25 Kin of Ltd.
28 Possessed
29 Fabric former
31 Bach's middle name
37 Energy
38 Destitute
39 Kett and James
41 Experts
42 Donkeys
44 Water additives
46 Refrain from taking part
48 Large quantity
49 6 on the dial
50 Certain blanket
57 Talk idly
58 Very happy
60 Mentally alert
62 Sheep
64 Hurt
65 Assembly of witches
66 Pierre's friend
67 "— evil"
68 Trifled
69 Pull one's — (fool)
70 Goof

DOWN
1 Santa —
2 Occurrence
3 Extent
4 Atlas item
5 Declares
6 Drive back
7 — up (blundered)
8 "I cannot tell —"
9 Don Johnson TV series
10 Choose
11 Cool — cucumber
12 Hits the slopes
13 Shoe fastener
20 List of candidates
22 Morning grass cover
24 Blue-pencils
26 "— on Sunday"
27 Salad plant
30 Islands off Irish coast
31 Spurt of energy
32 Dye for textiles
33 Climbing vine
34 The planet Mars: comb. form
35 From — Z
36 Recent trade pact letters
40 Woman's scarf
43 Mark the boundary of
45 Enzyme in muscle tissue
47 For shame!
51 Wild
52 Picture holder
53 Indy entrant
54 Different
55 Auxiliary verb
56 Taro root
58 Toward shelter
60 Deed
61 Sticky substance
63 Russian plane

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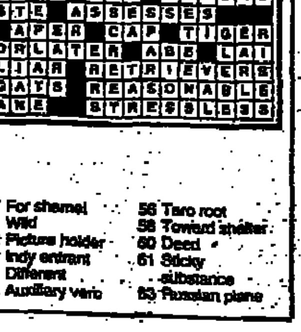
Puzzle solved:



Business Daily Beat

A review of economic news from the Arabic press

AFM maintains upward trend amid mixed signals in market

By a Jordan Times staff reporter

AMMAN — The easing of restrictions on commercial bank credits improved trading and prices at the Amman Financial Market (AFM) but the rise in interest rates that accompanied the relaxation of bank loan regulations attracted capital away from the stock exchange, brokers said Friday.

The weekly report of the AFM said turnover for last week was JD 6 million, a 50 per cent increase from the previous week, under 4,416 contracts which saw 2.9 million shares changing hands.

The general AFM share price index based 60 major companies closed at 144.2 point, up 1.3 points or 0.9 per cent from the week's opening.

Commercial bank stock gained an average of two points, or 1.2 per cent, during the week. Insurance shares closed with a gain of 0.8 points or 0.6 per cent, industrials with 0.7 points or 0.6 per cent, and service sector stock gained 0.4 points or 0.3 per cent.

Shares of 74 companies were traded during the week. As trading closed for the week on Wednesday, 43 of them had gained, 18 lost and 13 remained stable.

The industrial sector accounted for JD 2.9 million, or 48.3 per cent, of the weekly volume, followed by commercial banks and financial institutions with JD 1.6 million, or 26.7 per cent, the services sector with JD 1.4 million, or 23.3 per cent, and insurance stock with JD 100,000, or 1.7 per cent.

Brokers attributed the continued improvement in the market for the third week running to what investors saw as positive economic developments in the Middle East after a flurry of meetings grouping Arab states and Israel with the United States, the relaxation of rules governing local commercial bank credit facilities, and hopes that foreign capital was slowly coming to the market.

On the first count, the market was encouraged by indications of stronger American involvement in improving Jordan's as well as the region's economies in terms of trade and joint ventures.

"While no physical projects have materialised yet, investors expect to a boost to economic activities in Jordan as well as in the region that would benefit local companies in the medium and long term," commented a broker, who, like other AFM dealers, are not permitted to be quoted by name.

On the local scene, the move by the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) to relax commercial bank credits allowed the banks themselves to increase their AFM portfolios in addition to meeting market demand for individuals, brokers said.

"However, the CBJ move could have led to much higher figures in prices and turnover in the market last week but the rise in commercial bank interest rates appeared to have drawn out some capital from the stock exchange to the commercial banks," said the broker.

The broker noted that the recent issuance by the CBJ of certificates of deposit at around nine per cent annual interest was followed by a rise in commercial bank interest rates. "This was found by some AFM investors as a better option than subjecting their funds to the uncertainties of the stock market," said the broker.

On the third count, however, many brokers said they believed that a small infusion of foreign funds to local shares that had raised high hopes of massive foreign capital entering the AFM were a false alarm.

"Some investors appeared to have blindly jumped into the conclusion that the small buying two weeks ago was the forerunner of a massive flow of foreign funds," said another AFM dealer. "Obviously they did not consider that foreign portfolio firms are much more calculate than most local investors and do consider the impact of their entry to the market on share prices before actually buying local stock."

"Foreign buyers, in general, do not enter the market when prices are high," added the dealer. "They wait for the moment that they feel is the right opportunity to buy, and this, in most cases, comes when prices have hit a line that foreign investors consider the bottom."

"That is what happened two weeks ago," said the dealer, noting that the small foreign buying came when the index had gone down to nearly 140 points.

Municipality of Greater Amman to build three key tunnels

☆☆ The Municipality of Greater Amman (MGA) intends to open two tunnels under Jabal Amman and Jabal Lweibdeh in addition to the tunnel that it intends to open under Jabal Al Qalaa to ease the traffic congestion in the city. According to Mayor Mamdouh Al Abbadi, the Jabal Al Qalaa tunnel that will link Wadi Haddadeh with King Hussein Street, near the Palace of Justice. The Jabal Lweibdeh tunnel will begin from the Palace of Justice until Prince Mohammad Street, near Samir Al Rifai School. The third tunnel will start from the Al Rifai School and to Ras Al Ai'n, going under Jabal Amman. Mr. Abbadi stressed that there was no final solution to the traffic problem except by building tunnels at costs cheaper than constructing bridges and cheaper for doing maintenance in addition to maintaining the beauty of Amman's mountains. However, Mr. Abbadi said, MGA will build a bridge and a tunnel on the Fifth Circle but there will be not be any bridges or tunnels on the Sixth or Seventh circles. He explained that the solution to traffic congestion from the Fourth Circle until the Seventh Circle lies in constructing a parallel road to the Zahran Street and that the MGA has a plan to open a road from Al Qaisiyeh area to Wadi Abdoun and on to Queen Zein highway up to the industrial area in Wadi Al Seer (Al Ra'i).

☆☆ While consumers complain that car spare-parts are expensive, traders affirm that prices are declining despite being internationally high. Consumers base their frustration on the fact that customs have been recently reduced on car spares but they still do not feel the change as prices are still the same or, sometimes, even higher. Salameh Al Jundi, secretary-general of the Association of Car Dealers and Traders of Spare Parts, denies that prices of spare-parts, both new and used, have gone up. On the contrary, he stresses, prices have declined due to the recession in the market and the declining purchase power of the people, in addition to the stiff competition among merchants — which all have contributed to a state of general recession in the car spare-parts market. Mr. Jundi explains that the declining purchasing power of the people and the low incomes make any price unacceptable to the buyer who even tends to believe that there has been a price increase. He said the association and the Ministry of Supply had investigated many complaints but none could be verified. Merchants assert that despite many reasons which should cause a price rise such as the higher rate of the Deutschemark and other factors in the manufacturing countries, local prices of car spares have not risen. The merchants affirm that since the past two months, and because of the recession in the spares market, they have been selling at prices that are even lower than the ceiling fixed by the Ministry of Supply. Mr. Jundi says that at the time the ministry announced a new formula for calculating prices of car spare parts, there were about JD 300-JD 500 million worth of spares in the market. These spares, he pointed out, had to be reduced in price by 20 per cent in accordance with the new price decision. Bassam Yaish, owner of a spare-parts shop, was surprised when asked about complaints of higher prices. Mr. Yaish stressed that all merchants were selling at prices below what was fixed by the association and the government (Al Dustour).

U.S. firms sign $4b in China energy deals

BEIJING (R) — U.S. and Chinese firms Friday signed 26 energy deals worth $4 billion, a boost for electricity hungry China and a promising finale to a five-day trip by U.S. Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary.

The U.S. firms and their Chinese partners took turns to sit down and initial the contracts, letters of intent and memoranda of understanding.

The deals included a contract to explore for natural gas in the South China Sea, sales of U.S. wind turbines, hydropower and coal-washing equipment, components for a nuclear power station and joint venture power plants.

The largest deal was a letter of intent to set up a joint venture to build and operate a 1,200 megawatt power station in western Sichuan between the province's power company and a unit of General Public Utilities (GPU), one of the biggest power firms in New Jersey.

The plant requires a capital investment of more than $1.2 billion, with the U.S. share of the financing more than $1 billion, it said.

Such agreements are a boost for Chinese leaders, eager to channel more foreign capital and technology into the energy sector and reduce power shortages.

Foreign bankers have expressed concern over the terms under which China was inviting foreign capital into this sector, with Beijing eager to have no bank guarantees of repayment and a cap on the rate of return.

Ms O'Leary said she had not encouraged the Chinese firms involved in the power projects to offer a state bank guarantee for them, saying that the process was more important.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET

HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHMEISANI
TELEPHONE: 660170 / 663170
ORGANIZED MARKET TRADING ACTIVITY FOR THE PERIOD (18/02/1995 - 22/02/1995)
WEEKLY REPORT

COMPANY'S NAME	TRADING VOLUME JD	PREV. CLOSING PRICE	OPENING PRICE	CLOSING PRICE
ARAB BANK PLc	372,490	187.250	187.250	188.750
JORDAN NATIONAL BANK	143,628	4.310	4.310	4.500
JORDAN NATIONAL BANK / NEW	81,765	4.220	4.220	4.250
BANK OF JORDAN	1,993	3.550	3.550	3.600
MIDDLE EAST INVESTMENT BANK.	27,806	1.420	1.420	1.540
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BANK	17,763	2.650	2.650	2.780
THE HOUSING BANK	46,498	6.010	6.010	6.060
JORDAN KUWAIT BANK	24,479	2.990	2.990	3.000
JORDAN GULF BANK	79,482	1.420	1.420	1.400
JORDAN ISLAMIC BANK	588,594	3.750	3.750	4.000
BUSINESS BANK	1,408	3.550	3.550	3.520
JORDAN INVESTMENT & FINANCE BANK	8,180	4.100	4.100	4.090
BEIT ELMAL SAVING&INVESTMENT FOR HOUSING	2,835	3.100	3.100	3.150
AMMAN BANK FOR INVESTMENT	122,739	1.300	1.300	1.290
ARAB BANKING CORPORATION/JORDAN	15,105	4.000	4.000	4.150
PHILADELPHIA INVESTMENT BANK.	72,859	1.420	1.420	1.420
B A N K S S E C T O R	1609309 CHANGE		INDEX NUMBER: 161.51 : +1.23%	
GENERAL ARABIA INSURANCE	30,600	3.600	3.600	3.600
JORDAN FRENCH INSURANCE	45,358	2.430	2.430	2.550
HOLY LAND INSURANCE	5,414	2.500	2.500	2.550
I N S U R A N C E S E C T O R	82002 CHANGE		INDEX NUMBER: 137.07 : +0.56%	
JORDANIAN ELECTRIC POWER	87,257	1.540	1.540	1.550
JORDANIAN ELECTRIC POWER /NEW	425,435	1.440	1.440	1.500
JORDAN HOTEL & TOURISM	13,655	6.560	6.560	6.660
JORDAN KIMEH MINERAL..	3,070	2.950	2.950	2.900
ARAB INTERNATIONAL HOTELS	8,422	4.840	4.840	4.950
JORDAN NATIONAL SHIPPING LINES	230,279	3.410	3.410	3.420
NATIONAL PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	28,926	2.310	2.310	2.350
JORDAN INTERNATIONAL TRADING CENTER	2,893	0.970	0.970	0.970
JORDAN PRESS FOUNDATION / ALRA'I	3,578	11.650	11.650	12.000
UNITED MIDDLE EAST & COMMODORE HOTELS	68,276	2.440	2.440	2.350
ARAB INTER. FOR INVESTMENT & EDUCATION	21,387	3.640	3.640	3.510
S E R V I C E S S E C T O R	893177 CHANGE		INDEX NUMBER: 132.43 : +0.27%	
JORDAN TOBACCO & CIGARETTES	3,680	34.500	34.500	34.500
THE JORDAN CEMENT FACTORIES	301,914	2.990	2.990	3.050
JORDAN PHOSPHATE MINES	9,187	2.850	2.850	2.750
THE ARAB POTASH/NEW	12,018	5.050	5.050	5.050
JORDAN PETROLEUM REFINARY	37,846	9.400	9.400	9.450
THE INDUSTRIAL COMMERCIAL & AGRICULTURAL	5,910	3.850	3.850	4.000
THE JORDAN WORSTED MILLS	56,398	7.600	7.600	7.700
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL MANUFACTURING	839,481	4.500	4.500	4.740
JORDAN CERAMIC INDUSTRIES	6,312	5.800	5.800	6.040
THE JORDAN PIPES MANUFACTURING	22,861	2.680	2.680	2.700
ARAB CHEMICAL DETERGENTS INDUSTRIES	2,148	15.600	15.600	15.600
SPINNING & WEAVING	8,889	2.570	2.570	2.650
RAFIA INDUSTRIES	67,812	2.810	2.810	2.810
DAR AL DAWA DEVELOPMENT & INVESTMENT	157,622	8.000	8.000	8.000
ARAB INVESTMENT & INTERNATIONAL TRADE	56,544	0.960	0.960	0.970
ARAB ALUMINIUM INDUSTRY	25,913	6.750	6.750	6.750
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	117,568	0.770	0.770	0.770
ARAB PAPER CONVERTING & TRADING	86,340	1.410	1.410	1.430
NATIONAL STEEL INDUSTRY	948	4.040	4.040	4.040
INTERMEDIATE PETRO-CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES	5,005	2.470	2.470	2.470
JORDAN ROCKWOOL INDUSTRIES	8,745	1.400	1.400	1.350
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES	205	4.100	4.100	4.100
JORDAN INDUSTRIES & MATCH/TIMCO	29,177	0.760	0.760	0.770
NATIONAL CABLE & WIRE MANUFACTURING	42,079	4.820	4.820	4.800
JORDAN SULPHO-CHEMICALS	16,383	1.730	1.730	1.710
ARAB CENTER FOR PHARM. & CHEMICALS	18,413	2.560	2.560	2.650
KAWTEER INVESTMENT	1,207	1.700	1.700	1.680
UNIVERSAL MODERN INDUSTRIES	66,775	4.200	4.200	4.250
JORDAN INDUSTRIAL RESOURCES CO.	165,201	2.050	2.050	2.090
I N D U S T R I A L S E C T O R	2170893 CHANGE		INDEX NUMBER: 124.75 : +0.55%	
G R A N D T O T A L	4755380		INDEX NUMBER: 144.23	

PARALLEL MARKET TRADING ACTIVITY FOR THE PERIOD (18/02/1995 - 22/02/1995)
WEEKLY REPORT

COMPANY'S NAME	TRADING VOLUME JD	PREV. CLOSING PRICE	OPENING PRICE	CLOSING PRICE
CENTRAL GENERAL TRADING & STORAGE	208,912	0.900	0.900	0.960
JORDAN TRADE FACILITIES	57,915	0.800	0.800	0.800
MIDDLE EAST FOR DEVL.& TRADE CO.	100	0.500	0.500	0.500
ZARKA PRIVATE UNIVERSITY	36,735	1.460	1.460	1.470
UNIFIED CO. FOR ORGANIZING LAND TRANS.	83,065	2.310	2.310	2.290
ARAB FIN INV.CO	155,923	1.010	1.010	1.010
ARAB FOOD & MEDICAL APPLIANCES	5,207	1.070	1.070	1.100
NATIONAL CHLORINE INDUSTRIES CO.LTD	71,883	1.680	1.680	1.700
NATIONAL TEXTILE & PLASTICS IND. CO	3,581	1.110	1.110	1.130
JORDAN NEW CABLE COMPANY	30,542	1.670	1.670	1.710
NATIONAL MULTIPLE INDUSTRIES	78,743	1.200	1.200	1.210
EL-ZAY READY WEAR MANUFACTURING CO.	23,684	2.300	2.300	2.250
INTERNATIONAL TOBACCO & CIGARETTES	95,761	1.560	1.560	1.570
NATIONAL ENGINEERING INDUSTRIES	100,773	1.200	1.200	1.230
UNION CHEMICAL & VEGATIABLE OIL INDUSTRI	33,628	2.600	2.600	2.600
JORDAN STEEL	269,436	0.970	0.970	0.990
ARAB ELECTRIC INDUSTRIES	17,380	1.030	1.030	1.000

LONDON EXCHANGE RATES

LONDON (R) — Following are the buying and selling rates for leading world currencies and gold against the dollar at midsession on the London Foreign Exchange and bullion markets Friday.

U.S. $1.00 costs

1.3928/38	Canadian dollar
1.4688/98	Deutschemarks
1.6466/76	Dutch guilders
1.2490/00	Swiss francs
30.25/29	Belgian francs
5.1500/50	French francs
1627.4/8.4	Italian lire
97.00/10	Japanese yen
7.2575/75	Swedish crowns
6.4770/20	Norwegian crowns
5.8130/80	Danish crowns

One sterling $1.5886/96
One ounce of gold $379.50/379.90

Financial Markets

Jordan Times in co-operation with Cairo Amman Bank

Central Bank of Jordan Exchange Rate Bulletin

Date: 23/2/1995

Currency	Bid	Offer
U.S. Dollar	0.6950	0.6970
Sterling Pound	1.1029	1.1064
Deutsche Mark	0.4710	0.4734
Swiss Franc	0.5547	0.5575
French Franc	0.1349	0.1356
Japanese Yen*	0.7145	0.7181
Dutch Guilder	0.4200	0.4221
Swedish Krona	------	------
Italian Lira*	0.0429	0.0431
Belgian Franc	------	------

* Per 100

Other Currencies

Date: 23/2/1995

Currency	Bid	Offer
Bahraini Dinar	1.8300	1.8450
Lebanese Lira*	0.041995	0.042850
Saudi Riyal	0.1849	0.1867
Kuwaiti Dinar	2.3150	2.3560
Qatari Riyal	0.1900	0.1920
Egyptian Pound	0.1900	0.2100
Omani Riyal	1.7960	1.8110
UAE Dirham	0.1887	0.1904
Greek Drachma*	0.2775	0.3115
Cyprist Pound	1.4450	1.5263

Precious Metals

Date: 23/2/1995

Metal	USD/Oz	JD/Gm*	Metal	USD/Oz	JD/Gm
Gold	379.45	7.50	Silver	4.83	0.111

* 24 Karat

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Report on Senna's death completed

Steering failure blamed for accident

BOLOGNE, Italy (AFP) — Steering failure is being blamed for the death of three-time world motor racing champion Ayrton Senna according to a legal source here Friday.

Earlier in the day a 500-page report on Senna's fatal crash at the San Marino Grand Prix last year and the fatal accident of Austrian Roland Ratzenberger at the same race, was handed over to Italian prosecutors.

Senna died from head injuries after his Williams ploughed into a wall at the infamous Tamburello corner during the May 1 race.

Ratzenberger, driving a Simtex, died following a crash the previous day during practice.

Prosecutors now have to decide whether or not anyone should be charged with manslaughter. Williams owner Frank Williams and team designer Patric Head are amongst 17 people who are under investigation by the Italian authorities.

The late Ayrton Senna

Earlier this year Max Mosley, president of FIA, motor sport's ruling body, warned that if any charges were brought Formula One teams may boycott Italy.

"*It could make us look* at where we race and the circumstances under which we race," said Mosley.

Last week Patrick Head criticised the report on the crash.

"We have a copy of what *is supposedly the* expert's report going to the magistraate. I cannot actually believe that the technical people who I am aware were involved had any influence on it. It does not appear to have anything like the structure of somebody *with* a technically-trained mind," complained Head.

Chang aces his way through

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Defending champion Michael *Chang lost just eight points* on his serve in beating Jim Grabb 7-6 (7-5), 7-5 Thursday night in the second round of the Comcast U.S. indoor.

Chang, seeded third and ranked No. 6, fired eight aces, served five love games and didn't give up a break or a double fault.

Both players held serve until Chang broke Grabb in the 11th game of the final set. Serving at 40-0, he won when Grabb backhanded a second serve weakly into the net. Chang won the first-set tiebreak on a diving crosscourt backhand that passed Grabb at the net.

"It's my goal to get better and better (on serve) because it's a vital part of tennis," Chang said.

Grabb, a 13-year tour veteran who has made it to the quarterfinals in this event three times, had difficulty putting anything away, including overheads and drop shots.

Earlier, an agitated Jonathan Stark pulled off a 6-3, 4-6, 6-2 upset of fifth-seeded Patrick Rafter. Rafter, an Austrian ranked 20th in the world, backhanded a *110 mph serve long to lose* match point.

Chang, Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi are the only seeds remaining.

Also advancing was Richey Reneberg, a 7-5, 7-5 winner over ambidextrous doubles specialist Luke Jensen. Jensen, ranked no. 426, has won only two singles matches this decade.

Kafelnikov struggles on

In Stuttgart, Yevgeny Kafelnikov survived 17 aces by David Wheaton, overcame spells of dizziness and beat the American in three sets to reach the quarterfinals of the Eurocard Open.

"I still don't know how I'm winning these matches," said the Russian after his 7-5, 4-6, 6-4 victory.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Young America rallies to beat America3

SAN DIEGO (AFP) — Young America came from behind to defeat America3 by one minute and 19 seconds Thursday in an America's Cup defender trials race. The third round-robin in the defender trials ends when Stars and Stripes races America3. The third round of challenger trials concluded Wednesady. The all-women crew on America3 won the start by 12 seconds and led by 22 seconds at the first mark. But Young America took the lead on the first run and was never headed. The victory gave Kevin Mahaney's Young America sole possession of the lead in the defender standings.

Sigei to miss Nairobi cross country

NAIROBI (AFP) — More than 200 runners will line up here Saturday for the Nairobi International Cross Country Challenge, conspicuous by his absence will be Kenya's two-time World Cross Country champion William Sigei. Sigei is nursing an injured ankle, made worse by his participation in the Kenya National Cross Country race, which he trailed in below 40th position. He is said to have left Nairobi for London for treatment. In his absence, Kenya will now pin its hopes for top honours in Saturday's event and the World Cross Country championship in Durban, Scotland in Paul Tergat, winner of the national race.

Nantes make history

PARIS (R) — French soccer league leaders Nantes made history on Thursday when they drew 1-1 at St. Etienne to extend to 27 matches their unbeaten run since the start of the season. The young Breton team, who scored through striker Nicolas Ouedec in the 18th minute and concede an own goal by defender Christian Karembeu in the 64th, beat *the record set in 1987 by Paris St. Germain, who went 26* matches without defeat to start the season. PSG now share with Nantes the overall unbeaten record in the French league. The Parisians remained unbeaten for 27 matches in the middle of the 1992-1993 season.

Khan gets draw he wanted

CARDIFF (AFP) — Jansher Khan was handed the British Open draw that he believes will help him extend a record for Pakistan here Friday. The top-seeded title-holder from Peshawar should have a comfortable ride to the last four and if he wins the world's oldest and most prestigious title a fourth time in a row it will be the 14th consecutive time a Pakistani has won it. That will beat the previous best set up in the 1950's and 60's by four other famous Panthans, Hashim, Azam, Roshan and Mohibullah Khan. Roshan's son Jahangir Khan won the British Open a record ten times immediately prior to Jansher's first success in 1992.

Wachter out for the season

VIENNA (AP) — Austria's top woman skier, Anita Wachter, will have to sit out the rest of the season because of torn ligaments in her knee and ankle, the Austrian press agency reported Thursday. The 28-year-old Wachter, who had arthroscopic surgery on her left knee three years ago, re-injured it and her left ankle in a fall on the slopes during practice Wednesday. Wachter won the combined gold medal, for the downhill and slalom combined, in the 1988 Olympics and finished second in the 1992 Olympics.

Schoolboy may be future NBA star

CHICAGO (AP) — Michael Jordan has retired. Frank Thomas is on strike. These days, the greatest show in Chicago sports is an 18-year-old kid named Kevin Garnett.

Never heard of him? You will.

Garnett, a 6-foot-11 (2.11-metre) center for Chiago's Farragut High School, is part Moses Malone, part Alonzo Mourning, part Magic Johnson. And if his skills and body keep developing, he might just follow those players into NBA stardom.

Garnett shakes backboards with dunks, blocks shots into the 15th row, caps fast breaks with look-away passes, swishes jumpers and scatters bodies under the boards.

College recruiters have been watching Garnett for years. NBA scouts are beginning to take note, too.

"The fact is, there are players his size in the NBA who don't have nearly as many skills," said Farragut coach William Nelson, the beneficiary of Garnett's decision to relocate from South Carolina to Chicago for his senior season. "He's better than a lot of NBA players."

Growing crowds have been packing high school gyms in the Chicago area to get a glimpse of Garnett and his flashy teammate, swingman Ronnie Fields.

Saturday, more than 5,000 fans squeezed into DePaul's Alumni Hall and watched in awe as Garnett dominated Philadelphia's Roman Catholic, one of the top U.S. high school teams.

Garnett had 22 points, 16 rebounds, nine blocked shots and six assists. Those are close to Garnett's season averages for Farragut, which has a 22-1 won-lost record.

In the third quarter alone, the thrilled audience saw Garnett: block three shots; catch fields' long pass, lay in the ball and get a technical foul for taunting; throw in a two-handed jam that left the backboard shaking for 45 seconds; steal the ball at mid-court and feed Maurice Woodfork for a dunk; make two jumpers in the lane; and tip in a missed Farragut shot.

Hundreds of fans remained after the Admirals' 84-72 victory, chanting Garnett's name, patting him on the back and asking for autographs.

Though his dunk brought the crowd to its feet, it was Garnett's variety of pinpoint passes — from the high post, the low post and on the move in break situations — that showcased what makes him special.

"It's a South Carolina thing. You give the ball up and trust your teammates to give it back," said Garnett.

Suns lose again but lead Pacific Division

NEW YORK (AP) — Charles Barkley isn't easily impressed.

After his Phoenix Suns were beaten by San Antonio 105-100, Barkley said he didn't consider the Sprus a contender in the West.

"It's a three-dog race and the Spurs aren't one of them," said Barkley, who missed 15 of 22 shots against San Antonio. "They cannot beat us in a seven-game series. We have a better team than they do. They played as good as they can tonight, and we did not play very good, and we still should have won."

San Antonio's Sean Elliott disagreed.

"You guys listen too much to Charles and what he's saying," said Elliott, who scored seven of his 19 points in the final two minutes before a season-high crowd of 34,215 at the Alamodome.

"I think it's good to be in our position. We might be able to surprise some people."

The Spurs, who trail first-place Utah by 2 games in the Midwest Division, have won three in a row and 12 of 14 games.

"It was a struggle," coach Bob Hill said. "We had a lot of problems, but we stood in there and showed a lot of courage."

David Robinson scored 34 points and Dennis Rodman grabbed 24 rebounds for the Sprus, who took their first lead of the second half on Elliott's layup and foul shot with 1:48 left.

"This team is getting a lot of confidence in those situations," Elliott said. "We believe we can go out there and finish teams off."

Phoenix has lost three of four after starting the month 5-1. The Suns, who lost to Boston on Tuesday night, have dropped two in a row for the first time this season, but still lead the Pacific Division by three games over Seattle.

"I'm very proud of our team," Phoenix coach Paul Westphal said. "Coming back from last night was tough, but we played sensational defence. We did all we can do, but they got all the breaks. We're not crying, but it is too bad we didn't win."

Pacers 113, Nets 94: At East Rutherford, Reggie Miller scored 27 points and Indiana shot 58 per cent from the field to win its fourth consecutive game. The loss spoiled Derrick Coleman's return to the Nets' lineup. He had 14 points and 10 rebounds after missing six games with a chip fracture of his pelvis.

Hornets 100, Kings 89: At Charlotte, Alonzo Mourning had 29 points and 17 rebounds for the Hornets. Mugsy Bogues and Larry Johnson each added 19 points for Charlotte, which used a 10-3 run to take a 72-58 lead late in the third quarter. Walt Williams lead Sacramento with 28 points.

Bucks 100, Bullets 92: At Milwaukee,, Todd Day scored 21 points and ignited a late 7-0 run by the Bucks. Day made a 3-pointer to give Milwaukee its first lead of the *fourth quarter, 89-88, with* 2:49 left. Day then stole the ball from Calbert Cheaney, and Marty Conlon hit a jumper to put the Bucks ahead 91-88. Cheaney scored 22 *points for the Bullets, who* have lost 11 of 12 games.

Jazz 118, Clippers 109: At Salt Lake City, Karl Malone scored 29 points and Utah used a 9-0 fourth-quarter run to beaet the Clippers. After Pooh Richardson's jumper cut Utah's lead to 97-96 with 7-43 left in the fourth period, Malone and Adam Keefe combined for all nine of Utah's points during the decisive run. Richardson and Loy Vaught led the Clippers with 21 points apiece.

Sonics 120, Timberwolves 104: At Tacoma, Kendall Gill scored 15 of his career-high 34 points in the third quarter and Shawn Kemp had 20 poionts and 13 rebounds for the Sonics. Seattle led by 35 points twice, including 104-69 after three quarters, en route to its 15th straight victory over the Timberwolves. It was the 300th career victory for Seattle coach George Karl.

THURSDAY'S RESULTS

Boston 119	***Orlando 117***
New York 103	**Sacramento 90**
Atlanta 110	**Dallas 92**
Denver 105	**Philadelphia 75**
Houston 110	**Detroit 99**

Kiptanui attacks own 3,000 record

LONDON (R) — Moses Kiptanui attacks his own world 3,000 metres indoor record on Saturday less than two weeks after he reduced his previous mark by 2.1 seconds.

The world steeplechase champion takes on Burundi's Venuste Nioyngabno, one of the most talented young middle distance runners in the world, at an international meeting in Birmingham, England, in a field which includes three other talented Kenyans.

"We have got all the ingredients for a world record," Ian Stewart, the British Athletic Federation (BAF) promotions officer, said this week.

Irishman Paul Donovan has being designated as the pacemaker for the first two kilometres.

Kiptanui, 23, lowered the mark to seven minutes 35.15 seconds in Ghent, Belgium, on February 12.

Olympic and world 100 metres champion Linford Christie, who broke the world indoor 200 metres record in Lievin, *this month has* pulled out of Saturday's 200 because a back injury. Christie will still, however, complete inthe 60 metres where he has clocked the year's fastest time of 6.47.

In Christie's absence Namibia's world outdoor champion Frankie Fredericks takes on world silver medallist John Regis with Nigeria's Olapade Adeniken and Regis's training partner Darren Braithwaite also in the field.

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♣ A K J 6 5 4

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♡ K Q J 10 8 5 4
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♣ 10

EAST
♠ 10 8 4 3 2
♡ Void
♢ 10 6 3 2
♣ Q 9 8 7

SOUTH
♠ A Q J 5
♡ A 7 3
♢ A K Q 8
♣ 3 2

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
2 NT	3 ♡	3 NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Opening lead: King of ♡

There were all sorts of results on this deal from the 1993 World Team Championship held in Santiago, Chile. For those who reached three no trump, as did Wubbo de Boer of the winning Netherlands team, the hand was an object lesson on counting.

De Boer landed in three no trump on the auction shown. Five clubs and five diamonds were other popular contracts, neither of which succeeded when the declarers failed to find the winning line. But de Boer, as did Mari Ryman and Wen Gong of the Swedish and Chinese Women's teams, showed that three no trump was easy.

The opening heart lead was taken by the ace in the closed hand as East discarded a spade. Declarer crossed to the king of clubs, returned to hand with a diamond and led another club. *Had West followed*, declarer would have finessed and that would have been that—East could make no harmful return and the jack of diamonds was the entry to the table's clubs.

When West discarded a heart, declarer won the ace of clubs and cashed three more rounds of diamonds. Declarer had a complete count of West's distribution. West had started with 3-7-2-1 and had to come down to six cards, since declarer had taken the first seven tricks.

If West retained four hearts and two spades, declarer would exit with a heart and, after taking four tricks in the suit, West would have to lead a spade into declarer's major tenace. Instead, West came down to five hearts and the bare king of spades. Declarer cashed the ace and, had the king not dropped, East would have been thrown in when declarer continued with the queen of spades. Sooner or later East would have to yield the fulfilling trick either to declarer's spade or dummy's jack of clubs.

TODAY AT

Cinema Tel.: 634144 PHILADELPHIA	Cinema Tel.: 699238 PLAZA	Cinema Tel.: 677420 CONCORD	Tel.: 618274 - 618275 AMMOUN THEATRE	Tel.: 675571 Nabil Al Mashini Theatre	Nabil & Hisham's Tel.: 625155 AHLAN THEATRE
Robert De Niro & Nick Nolte in **Cape Fear** Shows: 12:30, 3:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	Christina Applegate — in **Don't Tell Mom "The Babysitter's Dead"** Shows: 12:30, 2:30, 8:30, 10:30	**CONCORD '1' BAD GIRLS** Shows: 12:30, 3:00, 8:15, 10:30 **CONCORD '2' SPEED**	Mousa Hijazin "Sumaah" in the political comedy **"Hi Citizen"** Author and Director: Mohammad Al Shawaqfeh Daily starting 8:30 p.m. Monday is the weekly holiday	Presents **Abu Awwad** in the social comedy **Punctured Bag** The theatre is closed on Mondays Tickets are available all day	Presents: The political satire: **AL SALAM YA SALAM** at 8:30 p.m. For reservation, please call 625155 The theatre is closed on Saturdays & Sundays

King to lead U.S. into new Federation Cup

NEW YORK (R) — The U.S. Tennis Association named former great Billie Jean King as captain for the new-style Federation Cup team Thursday, and King said she was thinking about asking another famed past champion to play.

King, a member of seven winning teams, said in a tele-conference from her Chicago office that among the players she will be trying to enlist this season will be 38-year-old Martina Navratilova.

"No question, she is still up there in the top five in doubles," King said on Navratilova, who retired from singles competition at the end of last year. Navratilova won 18 Grand Slam singles titles and 31 in doubles in her career.

King said she plans to talk to Navratilova, whom she coached the past five years, sometime this weekend along with, among others, Gigi Fernandez, MaryJoe Fernandez, Zina Garrison and Lori McNeil.

King will be assembling a pool of six to 12 players who will be available for Federation Cup competition, which will be patterned after the men's Davis Cup format. Team officials said the squad will be named next Thursday.

Four of those players will be selected for the opening round match against Austria on April 22-23 in Miami.

"I really want to include everyone, youngsters and up," said King 51, who replaced Marty Riessen as U.S. captain.

Though the United States has won the cup a record 14 times, it has not won since 1990 and lst reached the final in 1994, falling 3-0 to Spain.

King, who was on the winning team in the inaugural cup in 1963, promised an all-out commitment to winning.

Martina Navratilova

"I like to win, I hate to lose," said King, who shares with Rosie Casal the U.S. record for most doubles wins with 27 and is second behind Chris Evert in total Fed Cup singles and doubles wins with 52.

"I'm fanatical the way I coach that you should never underestimate your opponent and never take anything for granted no matter who you play."

Instead of 32 nations playing in a one week, knockout tournament format at one venue, the revised format features eight nations in the World Group, playing home or away matches, like the Davis Cup, through the year.

After April's first round, the semifinals are July 22-23 and the final November 25-26.

Each match is best-of-five matches, with four singles and one doubles.

King applauds the new format.

"It will allow for more exposure and being able to play at home is also good," said King. "My job is to get everyone in there and have everybody think about Fed Cup and what an honour it is to play for your country.

"My job is to make sure that happens."

European Basketball

Panathinaikos, Limoges lead standings

LONDON (R) — In Madrid, Panthinaikos beat Real Madrid 68-66 in a nail-biting finish to take top spot in Group A in the men's European Champion Clubs' basketball championship.

At the end of a seesaw match which neither side led by more than six points, Miroslav Pekarski earned the victory for the Greeks with his only basket of the match one minute from time.

He put Panathinaikos ahead 67-65 and also made a free throw to make it 68-65.

Madrid, who missed many three-point attempts, tried to get in position for another but were stopped by a personal foul and foiled again on an attempt to convert a failed free throw into a three-point shot.

Montenegrin Zarko Paspalj for Greece and Joey Arlaukus of the United States for Spain both got 23 points.

In Zagreb, former champions Cibona beat Turkey's Efes Pilsen 79-59, securing a place in the quarterfinals with their fifth straight win.

Cibona, European champions in 1985 and 1986, finished third in Group B by beating the Turks comfortably after trailing by as many as 13 points in the first half.

Quarter-final draw: Bologna V Panathinaikos, Cibona Zagreb v real Madrid, Pesaro v Limoges, CSKA Moscow v Olympiakos.

Matches to be played over two legs on March 9 and 14, with a thrid match on March 16 if aggregate scores level.

Semifinals, in Zaragosa, Spain on April 11: Bologna or Panathinaikos V CSKA Moscow or Olympiakos, Pesaro or Limoges v Cibona Zagreb or Real Madrid.

The final and third place play-off match are also in Zaragosa on April 13.

STANDINGS

Group A

Panathinaikos (Greece)	14	10	4	24
Real Madrid (Spain)	14	9	5	23
CSKA Moscow (Russia)	14	9	5	23
Pesaro (Italy)	14	9	5	23
Maccabi Tel Aviv (Israel)	14	8	6	22
PAOK Salonika (Greece)	14	6	8	20
Olimplja Ljubljana (Slovenia)	14	3	11	17
Benfica (Portugal	14	2	12	16

Group B

Limoges (France)	14	10	4	24
Olympiakos (Greece)	14	9	5	23
Cibona Zagreb (Croatia)	14	8	6	22
Bologna (Italy)	14	8	6	22
Barcelona (Spain)	14	8	6	22
Efes Pilsen (Turkey)	14	8	6	22
Bayer Leverkusen (Germany)	14	4	10	18
Joventut Badalona (Spain)	14	1	13	15

Russian star of University Games

JACA (AFP) — Russia's Olga Kosnacheva became the star of the World Winter University Games Friday, when she completed a clean sweep of all four cross country skiing gold medals. The student teacher from Moscow won Friday's 15km free style by nearly a minute and a half as Russia produced the first 1-2-3 finish of the Games. Kosnacheva, who led from start to finish, clocked 48min 20.6sec to beat Lulia Lemencuk (49:54.4) and Natalia Sokolova (50(08.8). Sokolova won her bronze by less than three seconds after a desperate battle to the line with Japan's Kanoko Goto (50:11:4).

Diving great Louganis admits he has AIDS

Officials express sorrow, demand blood tests

INDIANAPOLIS (Agencies) — U.S. diving officials Thursday expressed deep sorrow over the news that four-time Olympic champion Greg Louganis has AIDS and said he was treated properly for injuries suffering during the 1988 Seoul Games when he was already HIV positive.

"United States Diving expresses deep sorrow with the news of the health condition affecting diving great Greg Louganis," said U.S. diving president Steve McFarland in a statement issued by the organisation.

"U.S. diving shares in the grief felt by family, friends and fans of Greg Louganis. Our hopes and prayers are with him as he prepares for the future struggles with this deadly illness."

In an interview to be broadcast on ABC television Friday, Louganis said has AIDS and revealed that he knew he was HIV positive when he competed in Seoul, where he cracked his head on the diving board during the springboard competition and bled into the pool.

The news brought outrage from a former South Korean Olympic organisr who said Louganis should not have competed if the knew he was infected with the AIDS virus.

But U.S. diving officials said guidelines for treating blood-related injuries with regard to AIDS were not set until the following year.

"The 1988 Olympic Games was an event under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Olympic Committee. Procedures for treating such injuries were not specifically defined by the USOC until 1989, the same year the centre for disease control releaed their guidelines" McFarland said.

"In Seoul, Greg Louganis was treated in a manner consistent with medical recommendations that were appropriate at that time."

Louganis went on to win the gold medal after being treated for his head injury and became the first man ever to sweep diving gold in consecutive Olympics.

"Throughout his career as an athlete, Greg Louganis was an outstanding representative of both the sport of diving in particular and the Olympic movement in general," the U.S. diving statement continued.

"His diving accomplishments, which included four Olympic gold medals, 47 U.S. national championships, five world championship titles and six Pan American Games gold medals, may never be equalled.

"There is no doubt AIDS and the HIV virus are among the most important health-related topics of our time. We strongly believe that these revelations, coming from a celebrated Olympic champion, will lead to increased education and awareness toward his very serious disease."

'Blood tests needed for contact athletes'

In Seoul, South Korea, blood tests should be mandatory for boxing and other contact sports as a preventive measure against AIDS, the chief organiser of the 1988 Olympics said Friday.

Park Seh-Jik was commenting on reports that U.S. diving gold medallist Greg Louganis participated in the Seoul Olympics knowing he had tested positive for the HIV virus that causes the deadly disease.

In the preliminaries of the 1988 springboard evetn, Louganis cracked his head on the board while making a reverse dive and bled into the pool.

"It once again has aroused the danger of AIDS spreading in some contact sports," Park said. "The IOC should carefully consider making blood tests mandatory for all contact athletes."

Park said there is no need to test athletes in sports with no physical contact.

He said he thinks there was no danger of other divers being infected in the pool in which Louganis bled but that the U.S. diver should feel "some degree of moral responsibility."

"I don't think he violated any rules by hiding the fact that he was HIV-positive, but his case awakens us to the danger of AIDS in sports," he said.

Cho Byung-Ryun, head of the medical team at the Seoul Olympics, said the chances of someone being infected in a pool with HIV-tainted blood are "almost nil."

"AIDS does not spread easily," he said.

He said his medical team briefly discussed whether to conduct blood tests for athletes participating in the Seoul Olympics but was discouraged by the International Olympic Commitee.

Cho said Louganis should not be blamed simply for not confessing to his health condition.

"From a medical point of view, he did not violate any rules and he had no obligation to do so," he said.

Francois Carrard, director general of the International Olympic Committee, agreed.

"The fact is that he was under no obligation to disclose his condition," Carrard said Thursday. "And secondly, from all the medical evidence available, there was not the slightest risk of any contamination."

In an interview with ABC news, Louganis, 35, said he tested positive for HIV just before the 1988 Games and that it has developed into AIDS.

He said he became "paralysed with fear" when he started bleeding in the pool but decided not to divulge his condition. The next day, Louganis easily won the springboard gold.

"I was so stunned," Louganis said. "I mean, what was going on in my mind at the time was, 'what's my responsibility? Do I say something?"

Louganis said he never told the USOC because "I was encouraged not do."

He said he felt sure the chlorinated water in the pool would dilute the virus.

Louganis is the only man to sweep diving gold medals at consecutive Olympics. He won four gold medals for springboard and platform diving at the Olympics in 1984 and 1988.

Campaign to heal lingering hatred over soccer disaster

LUSAKA, Zambia (AP) — Nearly two years after 18 top national soccer stars died in a plane crash off the coast of Gabon, Zambia has launched a massive publicity campaign to persuade its soccer fans that Gabon did not shoot down the plane.

Advertisements, fliers, car stickers, T-shirts, caps, and church and theatre groups will urge Zambians to bury real or imagined differences with Gabon, said Zambia's state-run information service, the campaing organisers.

It said the $300,000 campaign is aimed at averting violence against Gabonese players and supporters during an Africa Cup match scheduled for April 9 in Lusaka.

Since the Zambia air force plane carrying 28 players and officials to a World Cup playa-off in Senegal plunged into the sea on April 28, 1993, Zambia has accused Gabon of obstructing investigations into the crash.

Because of the dispute, a popular belief emerged that the plane had been shotdown after passing over a Gabonese military base, said Patrick Jabane, director of the Zambian information service.

The indebted Zambian government says it has not been able to afford a report on the crash by independent investigators, including the Canadian makers of the Buffalo military transport plane.

"In the absence of the report, we assume there is no one to blame. All we know is that there was a plane crash," Jabane said.

He said diplomatic efforts have been made for several months to improve relations with Gabon.

Last August, the Confederation of African Football was forced to postpone one international match after both countries said they could not guarantee the safety of players.

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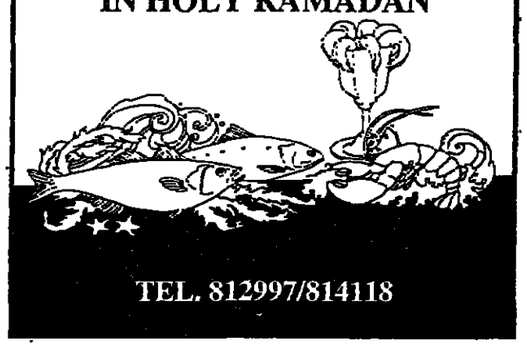

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هكذا من الأصل

Israel, Egypt avert NPT showdown; tensions linger

TEL AVIV (Agencies) — Israel and Egypt averted a showdown over the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) after Egypt withdrew a threat not to sign the pact unless Israel did, Israeli officials said Friday.

However, the two sides remain at odds on other key issues in the nuclear dispute, including Egypt's demand that nuclear disarmament be negotiated now in regional arms control talks.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said he rejected the demand when he met Thursday in Cairo with his Egyptian counterpart, Amr Musa, and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

"The Egyptians would like to start discussing now what the region should look like after peace (has been achieved)," Mr. Peres told the Haaretz daily after his return from Cairo.

"We oppose this, and I said we would only discuss this issue in the framework of peace and reconciliation," Mr. Peres said.

The nuclear dispute has caused one of the biggest strains in relations since Israel and Egypt made peace in 1979.

Egypt has insisted that Israel sign the NPT, which is up for renewal in April. Egypt has threatened not to renew its signature unless it is joined by Israel which is widely reported to possess nuclear weapons.

An Israeli official said Friday that Egypt no longer made the link. "The bottom line is Egypt is going to sign whether or not Israel does and Israel is not going to sign before comprehensive peace is reached in the region," said government spokesman Uri Dromi.

Another senior Israeli official said Egypt has no means to force Israel into signing the NPT.

"Egypt has no means of pressuring Israel into joining the treaty," said the official, who refused to be named.

"Israel does not have to make any gestures to Egypt," he said and cast doubt on Egypt's threat to pull out of the treaty.

"The procedures for withdrawing are very complicated," the official said.

Peres announced "agreement on some parts and disagreements on others" of the NPT after his talks in Cairo.

"We agreed to continue our consultaions and our negotiations in the future," he said.

Israel — citing threats from Libya, Iraq and Iran — has said it would only consider signing the NPT after it has signed peace treaties with all countries in the region.

The Egyptians issued conflicting statements Thursday.

After a meeting with Mr. Peres, Mr. Musa said that, "the question of signature is the right of every country to decide."

But he later denied he backed down. "Our position is that Israel's adherence to the NPT is essential ... adherence equals signing," he told the Associated Press.

Mr. Peres told the Egyptians on Thursday that Israel was ready to consider signing the NPT within two years after it has concluded peace treaties with all the countries in the region.

Haaretz said the Egyptians were cool to the idea, and demanded that Israel commit itself to signing the nuclear pact at that time, rather than considering a signature.

Mr. Dromi said that even though many disagreements remained, the crisis has been defused. "I think what happened yesterday is we agreed to disagree but that tensions were eased," Mr. Dromi said.

In another sign of a rapprochement, Egyptian Ambassador Mohammad Bassiouny returned to Tel Aviv on Friday, 10 days after he had been recalled to Cairo for consultations, Israel Radio said.

Also Friday, the head of the U.N. team that inspected Iraq's arms arsenal after the 1991 Gulf war was quoted as saying that Israel's reported nuclear arsenal served as a deterrent.

"It had powerful influence, especially in light of the uncertainty among the Arabs whether Israel has nuclear ability and if so, what it is," the nuclear expert, David Kay, said in an interview with the Maariv daily.

"If I was the prime minister of Israel, I would never sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty," he said.

Meanwhile 71 per cent of Israelis support the government's refusal to sign the NPT, according to an opinion poll published Friday.

The Yediot Aharonot newspaper found only 23 per cent in favour of joining the treaty while six per cent voiced no opinion.

The Dahaf Institute questioned 501 people for the survey which has an error margin of four per cent.

REMEMBRANCE: A Russian mother whose son was killed while serving in the army takes part in a ceremony along with other mothers at an Orthodox church in Moscow. The Day of the Defender of the Fatherland is marked in Russia on Feb. 23 (AFP photo)

Zeroual vows to fight violence after prison mutiny crushed

ALGIERS (Agencies) — Algerian President Liamine Zeroual has pledged a relentless battle against extremist violence after his forces crushed a prison mutiny that Islamic leaders say killed twice the official death toll of 100.

Speaking on Thursday after one of the bloodiest episodes of Algeria's recent history, Mr. Zeroual denounced what he called "the destructive and criminal terrorists' rage" and vowed "the state's determination ... to fight terrorism relentlessly."

Algerian authorities said 100 people, 96 of them prisoners, died in the Algiers prison mutiny that was crushed on Wednesday.

Islamic leaders accuse authorities of deliberately massacring twice that number of prisoners in the Sekadji high-security jail.

The first official statement on the death toll said 81 of the dead were Muslim fundamentalists charged with "terrorist" acts. The other 15 were common criminals.

It said four prison warders were killed by the mutineers.

Twelve people were injured, two of them prison warders, said the statement from the Algerian public prosecutor's department.

"This is the right toll and any other toll does not conform to reality and to the inquiry's results," it added, referring to an investigation ordered by the Justice Ministry.

An exiled fundamentalist leader claimed that the killings were a "deliberate massacre" programmed by authorities and demanded an investigation.

Anwar Haddam, who heads the Washington-based parliamentary delegation of the Islamic Salvation Front, said 200 inmates were killed after guards apparently evacuated prisoners then carried out "systematic shootings."

The statement based its account on what it said were reports by human rights activists of past prison uprisings.

Mr. Haddam called for an independent investigation of "this and similar crimes," a reference to a November uprising at a prison in Berouaghia prison in which he claimed that more than 500 prisoners were killed.

Algerian Television on Wednesday night showed a cache of weapons reportedly seized during the revolt, raising suspicion of complicity.

Officials said inmates armed with homemade knives and other weapons took seven guards hostage Tuesday, then began organising an escape of up to 1,000 jailed Islamic militants and regular prisoners.

Four of the guards were murdered, and more than a dozen other prison employees and security forces members injured during the rebellion, Justice Minister Mohammad Teguia said on state radio.

The Islamic Salvation Army, armed wing of the FIS, said Thursday that two FIS officials and a member of the GIA were among those killed.

It said that Abdul Kader Hachani, FIS leader when the movement was banned, was spared.

Officials said that Lembarek Boumaarafi, an army officer charged in the 1992 assassination of President Mohammad Boudiaf, was among those killed.

Confusion surrounded the prison killings. Accounts conflicted even within the ranks of Islamic militants.

The Islamic Salvation Army said in its bulletin made available in Paris, that the revolt was "conducted by our mujahedeen brothers." It put the death toll at "more than 90 prisoners" and made no mention of a systematic massacre.

The prison, on a hill above Algiers' casbah, near the Defence Ministry, reportedly holds hundreds of militants arrested since the start of a crackdown on fundamentalists three years ago.

Authorities are using strong-arm tactics to try to put down an Islamic insurgency mounted after the army cancelled January 1992 legislative elections to thwart a likely fundamentalist victory.

Although the revolt failed, it is seen in Algiers as an additional sign that fundamentalists fighting the military-backed government are determined to maintain their pressure.

"They want to show that they are stronger whether in jail or outside. The message is that they are also determined to harass the government," an Algiers-based diplomat said.

Iraq is hoping to end oil ban

BAGHDAD (Agencies) — Iraq is telling its people the oil embargo will fizzle out this year despite U.S. moves to head off action at the U.N. for an easing or lifting of the ban.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright was starting a tour of several U.N. Security Council members on Friday to counter attempts by Russia and France for a let up in the stringent regime of Iraq's sanctions (see page 2).

State-run Iraqi newspapers said the move was proof of U.S. isolation at the council and pointed to the success of Baghdad's efforts in turning most of its members on the Iraqi side.

"America is cornered at the Security Council. It is concerned of the pressure that is building up for a lifting of sanctions," the official Al Iraq said in reporting Ms. Albright's tour.

President Saddam Hussein, in a cabinet meeting on Thursday, told his people that "God willing the (Iraqi) ship will safely sail to the other side of the river," in reference to a quick end to the oil embargo slapped on Iraq after it invaded Kuwait in 1990, sparking the Gulf war which drove Iraqi troops out.

The official line in Baghdad is that no matter how hard Ms. Albright tries, the world, particularly Europe, will not forsake their economic interests for "Washington's whimsical interpretation of U.N. resolutions."

U.N. inspectors charged with overseeing the dismantling of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction as required under terms of the Gulf war ceasefire have consistently declined to say that Baghdad has totally met their requirements.

Rolf Ekeus, the chief U.N. arms inspector, left Baghdad Thursday and said he had not been able to resolve differences over Iraq's past biological warfare research.

However, "I think we have made good progress," Mr. Ekeus told reporters.

But he reiterated his displeasure with Iraq's declarations about its past biological warfare research.

"There, we are completely not happy with the (lack of)

(Continued on page 7)

COLUMN

2-year-old saved from drowning by alert dog

MARSEILLE (AFP) — A two-year-old girl was saved from drowning by her alert puppy which pulled the little girl from a pool where she had fallen in the southern French town of Meyrargues, the Provencal newspaper reported Friday. The daily said two-eyar-old Coralie had wandered away from her parents as they were cleaning up their garage Monday and fell into a neighbour's pool. Dedi, the boxer, quickly grabbed the child and pulled her to the edge of the poll, where the panicked parents found Coralie crying and Dedi comforting her by licking her face. "It's a real miracle," said the relieved mother.

Workers dig up bomb in Italy

RAVENNA, Italy (AFP) — Workers repairing a sewer found a World War II-era bomb Thursday, forcing the evacuation of 2,000 people while experts got rid of it. The bomb had been dropped by American warplanes on the town of Solarolo in east-central Italy during the war. Bomb disposal experts said it contained 180 kilogrammes (500 pounds) of explosives. It took them an hour to remove the bomb.

The Cuban exile who would be president

TAMPA, Florida (R) — A Cuban exile now living in Florida will be part of an inauguration ceremony in Tampa Friday that he claims will make him the president of Cuba. According to an article in Thursday's Tampa Tribune, Jose Morell Romero says he is the last surviving Supreme Court justice of Cuba. Mr. Romero and his Tampo-based backers claim the presidency based on Cuba's 1940 constitution. In the constitution, the senior Supreme Court justice is to be named president until a new president can be elected. Mr. Morell told the newspaper his first order of business will be to receive official recognition from the United States as the only legitimate Cuban government. He also plans to establish diplomatic ties to all the Latin American countries, naming ambassadors to each. Mr. Morell left Cuba in 1960, after denouncing the regime of Fidel Castro. The nation's Supreme Court collapsed after his departure. Although Mr. Morell told the newspaper he hoped to represent all Cubans, several Floridak Cuban-American organistions said they were unaware of his plans.

Man with no face seeks damages after blast

SENLIS, France (AFP) — A man whose face and fingers were blown off in an aerosol explosion appeared in court in this northern French town Wednesday seeking damages for an accident that ruined his life. Denis Benoliel, 32, is also seeking withdrawal from the market of the Neocide aerosol, manufactured by the multinational Reckitt and Coleman, whose propellant is a mixture of inflammable propane and butane. "I want to be the last human catastrophe of this type," said Benoliel, who has no ears, no nose and fingerless stumps for hands. On February 24, 1990, Mr. Benoliel, a real estate agent, tried to destroy an ants' nest in his bedroom using an aerosol. He lit a cigarette and the room blew up. Benoliel spent three months in a coma and in 30 operations, plastic surgeons could not rebuild his face. He has holes where his nose and ears should be, no hair and no eyebrows, and his eyesight was badly damaged. He said he refused an offer of one million dollars from Reckitt and Coleman provided he drop the case. Lukas Beyeler, 60-year-old president of the firm's French subsidiary who has been charged with involuntary wounding, said the aerosol had been on sale for 20 years, that nine billion cans had been sold in the world," and there has been no accident." "I am convinced that something else happened because no expert has been able to cause a similar explosion using an aerosol," said Beyeler.

U.N. beats hasty retreat from Somalia

MOGADISHU (Agencies) — Bulldozers crushed U.N. vehicles at Mogadishu airport Friday as U.N. troops pursued their hasty withdrawal from Somalia under the protection of a six-nation task force.

With no time to take all equipment out, the bulldozers rolled over four-wheel-drive vehicles to prevent them from falling into the hands of Somali militiamen and being converted into "technicals," with a heavy machine-gun mounted.

U.N. spokesman George Bennett said engines and other equipment were being removed first for shipment abroad, but expatriate drivers said the vehicles being destroyed were complete.

The withdrawal, which follows the failure of warlords to agree on a government of national unity for This lawless Horn of Africa country, was originally scheduled for March 31, but will now be completed at the end of this month — in just a few days.

The decision to speed up the retreat came after Somali militiamen looted abandoned compounds abandoned by the United Nations despite pledges by the warlords to respect them.

At the port and airport, with canteens gone, the last U.N. troops and civilians are subsisting on meals, ready to eat meals — updated versions of the C-rations supplied during the World War II.

Although promised cooperation by the country's leading warlords, Lieutenant-General C. Zinni, commander of the seven-nation military coalition, said his force was prepared to meet any threat. His plans, he said, were not "based on faith and trust."

Gen. Zinni, a commander with long experience in Somalia, said he did not think the faction leaders would risk a direct confrontation with the coalition.

Gen. Zinni is commanding 23 warships, 80 aircraft, including AC-130 gunships, Harrier jump jets and Cobra helicopters, and 14,000 men and women, more than half of them Americans.

"We've taken a look at the threat — at the worst case — and we've brought enough force to handle that threat," Gen. Zinni said Wednesday evening aboard this command ship.

Four hundred Pakistani troops flew out to their capital Islamabad on Friday, bringing the U.N. force down to some 3,800.

The last 2,500 men, from Pakistan and Bangladesh, will leave aboard troopships on Tuesday after more than 2,000 U.S. and Italian marines come ashore to protect their departure while another 7,000 troops from the United States, Britain, France, Italy, Pakistan and Malaysia stand by on board 18 warships offshore and gunships cruise the skies.

The battered city on the other side of the razor-wire was relatively calm Friday with only an occasional warning shot from a militiaman with a rifle — the equivalent, in Mogadishu, of a blast on a horn in Rome, a signal that one car with more gunmen aboard than another is demanding right-of-way.

The gunmen continued to ignore a peace-pact signed Tuesday between south Mogadishu warlord Mohammad Aideed and north Mogadishu strongman Ali Mahdi Mohammad to take guns off the streets, confine technicals to designated areas, and share control of the port and airport after the departure of the U.N. Troops.

Opposition groups to Arafat mushroom

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Groups opposed to the peace deal with Israel are mushrooming in the self-rule Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank some with the blessing of Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat.

Militant groups such as Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, have long called for an end to the autonomy deal.

In Damascus a coalition of 10 opposition groups has been fighting the agreement from the start.

But recent months have seen a mushrooming of local movements opposed to the peace deal including some authorised by the Palestinian self-rule authority.

Politicians here, however, are uncertain whether they will leave a lasting mark on the peace process, or whether they are simply a sign of division and discontent with the leadership.

"They all indicate that people are in a state of perplexity, they are anxious," said Haidar Abdul Shafi, a former senior negotiator with Israel who is forming his own group with Gaza and West Bank professionals and academics, to be named Movement for Building Democracy.

Dr. Abdul Shafi quit the peace process with the secret Oslo talks that led to the declaration of principles in September 1993, eight months before the start of autonomy in Gaza and the West Bank.

He said various initiatives had been started since the "the peace process has no credibility.

"How genuine they are remains to be seen, but the common factor behind them is a lack of unity in the ranks of Palestinians, which is to be deplored."

The new groups, at least two in Gaza and one in the West Bank town of Nablus, come at a time when Mr. Arafat himself is disillusioned with the peace process and has called for talks with all Palestinian factions.

In Gaza, the National Movement for Change is opposed to the autonomy agreement, but has a license from Mr. Arafat's self-rule authority.

"We are aiming for national unity," said Khadar Al Moghrabi, a co-founder of the movement and former member of the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Speaking in a basement office protected by an armed guard, Mr. Moghrabi said: "The Palestinian-Israeli agreement is a fact, but it does not meet our demands and needs to be corrected.

"The Palestinian Authority believes in the agreement. We seek to destroy it through democratic means."

Bassam Shakaa, former mayor of Nablus, announced on Wednesday he was setting up the Palestinian Coalition to represent forces from all over the occupied territory.

He released a statement calling on Mr. Arafat to resign, and described his new movement as "a popular coalition that includes national and religious forces opposed to the Oslo agreement.

"There is opposition, more and more frustration and anger, mixed with hope. Each person tries to express it his own way."

Meanwhile in Damascus hardline opposition groups have refused to take up the PLO's call for talks unless the autonomy accord with Israel is scrapped.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Netanyahu leaves Rabin trailing in polls

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was left 13 percentage points behind right-wing opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu in an opinion poll published Friday. The Likud party chief garnered 33 per cent support against 20 per cent for Mr. Rabin in the survey for Maariv newspaper. Mr. Netanyahu was credited with 25 per cent against Mr. Rabin's 23 per cent on Jan. 21. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres picked up 10 per cent and right-wing former Defence Minister Ariel Sharon four per cent in the poll carried out by the Motnin Institute. Far-right-wing Tsomet Party leader Rafael Eytan also took four per cent, maverick Labour deputy Chaim Ramon three per cent, Environment Minister Yossi Sarid two per cent and Likud deputy Dan Meridor one per cent. But 23 per cent voiced no opinion. The survey of 501 Israelis had an error margin of 4.5 per cent.

Israelis want death sentence overturned

TEL AVIV (AP) — An Israeli prosecutor has asked a military court to overturn the death sentence given to a Palestinian convicted of plotting a suicide bombing that killed five Israelis last year. Moshe Bachar said a lower court had overstepped its authority in November by ordering the execution of Said Badarneh, 24, instead of the six life sentences requested by prosecutors. The court adjourned without ruling or setting a date for the next session. The unusual request reflected the strong opposition to capital punishment in Israel. In the Jewish state's 47-year history, the only person executed was Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in 1962.

Vietnam, Algeria seek greater cooperation

HANOI (AFP) — Vietnam and Algeria on Friday pledged to increase their economic cooperation. During a visit to Hanoi by the Algerian minister of commerce, Saci Aziza, the two countries signalled their intention to sign several agreements, including a pact on investment protection, according to Vietnamese and Algerian officials. Algeria buys rice and coffee from Vietnam and hopes to diversify its economic cooperatiion by undertaking oil exploration and extraction, according to the Vietnamese press. Mr. Aziza, invited by his Vietnamese counterpart Le Van Triet, is leading an official delegation including businessmen which arrived on Monday. The delegation has already met Premier Vo Van Kiet. It will travel on to Ho Chi Minh City in the south before leaving on Sunday. Algiers and Hanoi have maintained diplomatic links forged during their common struggle against French colonial rule.

Life existed in UAE 6 million years ago

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Western scientists will meet here next week after years of research into pre-historic animals have helped reconstruct a picture of life in the region six million years ago, organisers said Friday. The March 3-11 conference in Abu Dhabi follows the discovery of fossilised bones of such animals as primitive horses, giraffes and elephants in the Baynuna area in Abu Dhabi's western region, they said in a statement. Another discovery involved some previously unknown species, such as a primitive gerbil, known locally as Abudhabia Baymunensis, the statement said. The scientists from the United States, Britain and other European countries will discuss 25 papers on fossils at the conference. "The preliminary results of those multi-disciplinary studies suggest that a large river system existed in Baynuna around six million years ago. Near to and in the river lived at least 28 species of mammals, six species of reptiles and two species of birds as well as fish and invertebrates," the statement said.

Iraq urges Kurds to end western protection

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq urged the Kurdish opposition in northern Iraq on Friday to rid themselves of U.S. and British protection because the West was only looking after its own interests. "The Kurdish groups must see reason and get rid of the protection of the United States or Britain," said the daily Al Thawra, mouthpiece of the ruling Baath Party. "They are not protecting anyone, just serving their own interests in the region," it said. "The inter-Kurdish conflict is the fruit of the colonial presence in northern Iraq," the paper added. Only Washington and London "stand to gain from the explosive situation." The Kurds have controlled north Iraq in defiance of Baghdad since the end of the January-February 1991 Gulf war, with the help of a U.S.-led air force based in Turkey that has imposed a "no-fly zone" for Iraqi planes over the region. But rival Kurds have clashed since last May.

NATO opens talks with Mideast, Maghreb countries

BRUSSELS (R) — The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), stressing it is not planning a new "crusade against Islam," cautiously opened a controversial dialogue with five Middle East and North African (Maghreb) states on Friday.

Hard-pressed NATO Secretary-General Willy Claes, his credibility at risk over a bribery scandal gripping Belgian politics, began the initiative by holding talks with representatives from Morocco.

NATO sources said separate meetings were to follow later in the day with Israel, Egypt, Mauritania and Tunisia, but stressed the low-key nature of the talks which they said would explore the development of areas of mutual concern.

Alliance planners, expressing a concern over extremism and weapons proliferation, say they want to extend security and stability on NATO's southern flank. The move has been strongly pushed by southern members Portugal, Spain and France.

But the initiative has been protested by Middle East countries not included in the process and led to sharp criticism of Mr. Claes by member states who accuse him of clumsily mispresenting the matter as a drive against "Islamic extremism."

Mr. Claes was carpeted by alliance ambassadors after saying he believed Islamic fundamentalism was as much a threat to the Western alliance as communism once was.

A furious Spanish diplomat said presentation of the move as a "new crusade" against Islam was dangerous and misleading.

"The purpose is to spread security, not find new enemies," he thundered.

NATO, which for years has focused on Eastern Europe, started looking over its shoulder after a secret report warned of the dangers of a rogue state or extremist group soon getting the capability to fire a nuclear missile at its defences.

Mr. Claes retracted his statement shortly afterwards, but his authority appeared badly shaken by the affair.

"Religious fundamentalism, whether Islamic or of other varieties, is not a concern for NATO," he said in a signed article in Britain's Financial Times.

But the damage had already been done.

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